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The Secret Compulsions of Bankers

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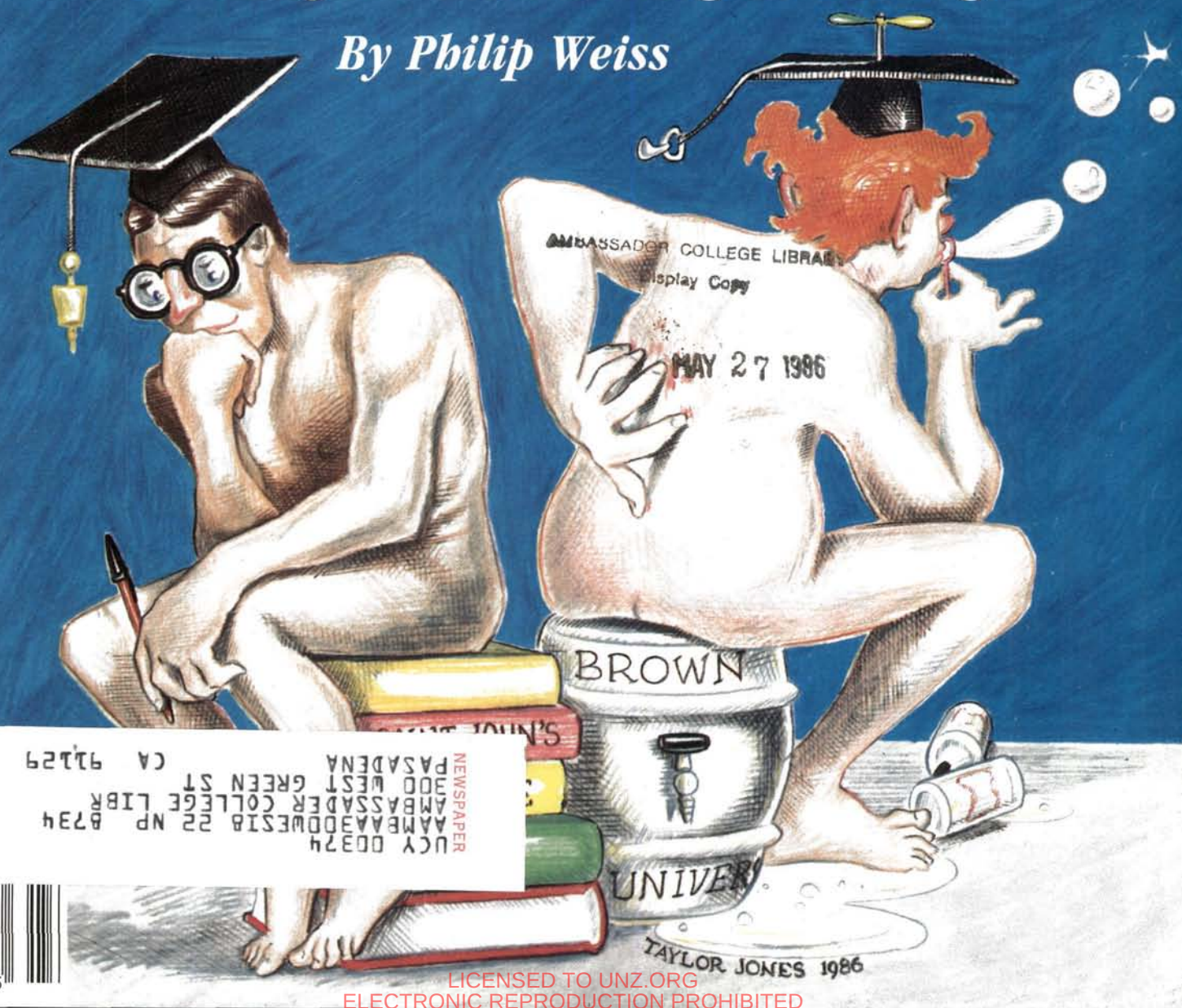
THE NEW REPUBLIC

Great Books U, Good Times U

Where higher education gets too high

By Philip Weiss



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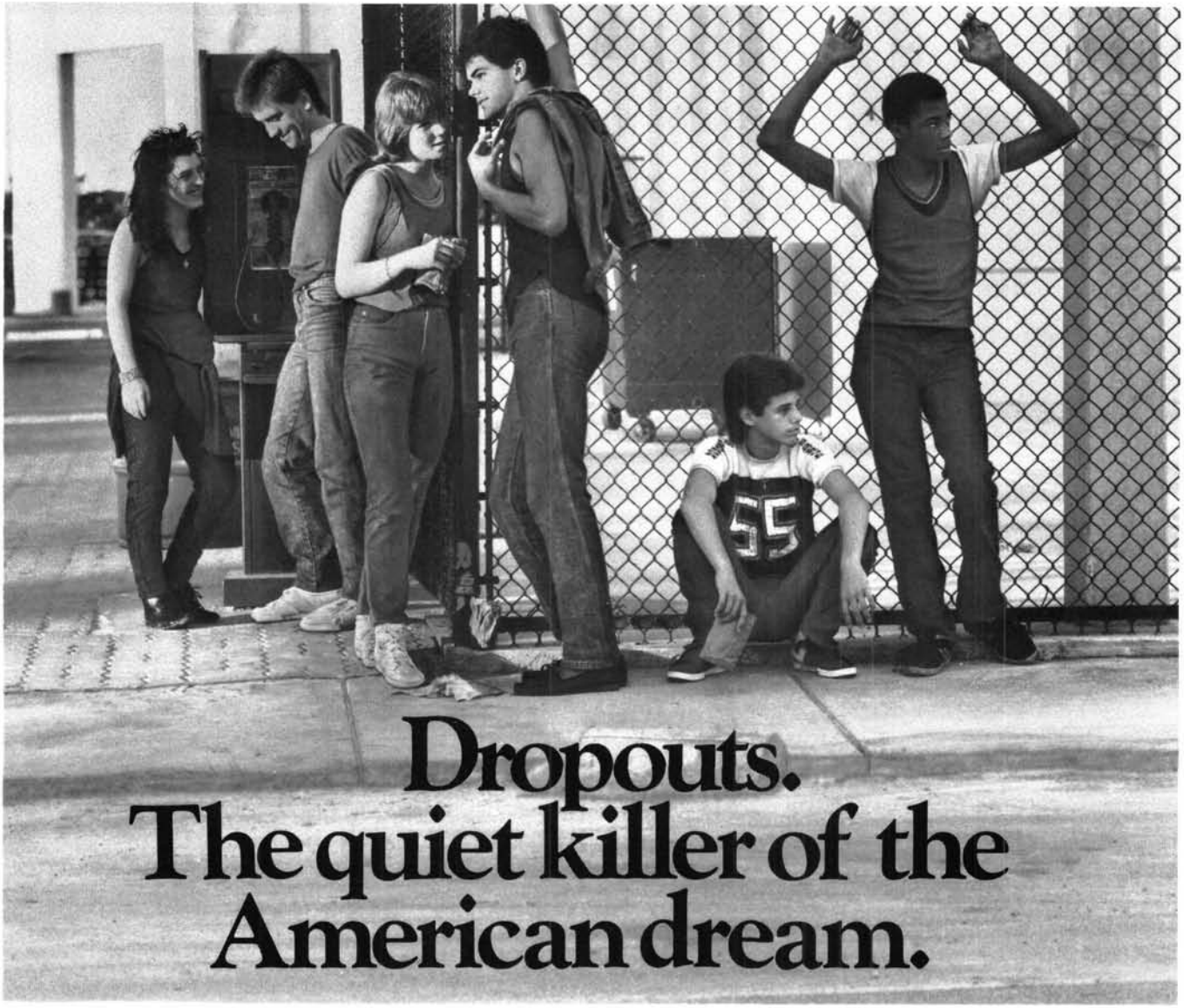

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The Business Advisory Commission of the Education Commission of the States recently called on all of society—business, schools, civic organizations, labor and professional groups— to address the dropout problem. We as a nation cannot let one quarter of America's youth continue to drift toward hopelessness.

That's why the National Education Association has initiated a major new effort to rescue young people from academic failure. NEA has committed $1.7 million to this effort—one dollar for every NEA member. We will devote $700,000 to this war-chest against scholastic failure to Operation Rescue, our new program to combat the dropout and illiteracy syndrome.

The remaining $1 million will establish an endowment to make educational excellence grants available to teachers for years to come. And we're asking other concerned groups—both inside and outside education—to join teachers in building this fund. Our aim is to begin funding local dropout prevention programs by the fall of 1986.

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

We Wuz Robbed

A good test of political seriousness is whether anyone opposes what you have to say. The Democratic Leadership Council, a group founded last year with the mission of moving the Democratic Party back toward the political center, wants the party to be "a force for advancing the common interest; for spurring growth, creating jobs and opportunity, and defending freedom." According to former Virginia governor Charles Robb, one of the DLC's founders, "The Republicans have ... appropriated themes which used to belong to the Democrats: keeping our economy healthy and our defense strong. Democrats need to reclaim these bedrock issues."

I suppose there are people who oppose growth and strength. And I suppose it's a good thing that the Democratic Party not be dominated by Club-of-Rome antigrowth loonies and weak-kneed appeasers, if it ever was. It may even be true that growth and strength were once associated in the public mind more with the Democrats than with the Republicans. Of *course* the Democrats should be for growth and strength. Also for public sanitation and child safety. But what is the point of trying to rebuild the party on such unobjectionable themes?

First, it probably won't work. If these issues were once thought of as Democratic, the Republicans stole them fair and square (in Senator S. I. Hayakawa's famous formulation about the Panama Canal). Perhaps these issues can be neutralized, but it will be a long time before growth and strength alone will be perceived as reasons to vote Democratic.

More important, though, why bother? Politics is not a game of capture-the-flag. If all the important things Democrats would like to say are already being said by Republicans, it's hard to see why stealing them back is worth the trouble.

The big question for Democrats—especially for groups like the Democratic Leadership Council and the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, which want to nudge the party toward the right—is what the party should do differently that doesn't amount to simply becoming more conservative. "We're just like the other guys, only somewhat less so" is not a very inspiring slogan. "What really distinguishes us from the Republicans is the breadth of our vision," says Robb. Another would-be centrist, Senator Joe Biden, says that in foreign policy the party must adopt a "commonsense" approach, avoiding "the ideological demons of both the right and the left."

But politics is about ideology, and the Democratic Party might as well fold up and go away unless it has the courage to present itself as forthrightly to the left of the Republicans. "To the left" needn't mean a rejection of growth and strength. But it must mean a demonstrated greater concern for the have-nots of our society and a greater skepticism about military adventure. Euphemisms like "breadth of vision" and "common sense" are timorous and demeaning.

In the present gilded-age atmosphere, calls for greater sacrifice by the haves on behalf of the have-nots may seem like an unpromising strategy. But sharper marketing minds than mine or yours disagree. Why else have the Coca-Cola Company and other large corporations been spending millions of dollars to associate themselves with the ridiculous "Hands Across America" campaign? They must be convinced that unselfishness can sell. And these are people who know what sells.

The only prominent Democrat attempting to peddle forthright progressive rhetoric, with some success, is Governor Mario Cuomo of New York. "Today the American scene is rife with contrasts ... contrasts of need and plenty," and so on. This is great stuff. Unfortunately, Cuomo is disingenuous about which side of the great divide his listeners are on. In a recent speech, after charging that "our prosperity has been purchased at the expense of the well-being, the hopes and expectations of a large part of our nation," he subtly switches gears and defines the exploited element as "moderate-income households and the poor." Moderate-income households means you, the typical voter. What begins as an inspiring appeal to Americans' sense of generosity ends as a bilious appeal to their sense of grievance.

Much of what the Democratic Party currently stands for domestically is nothing more than an expression of Cuomo's ideological sleight of hand: peddling selfishness as progressivism. Programs and policies like Social Security, farm price supports, IRAs, and trade protection all benefit people at least as well-off as those who are paying for them in taxes or higher prices. There is nothing progressive about these government initiatives in their present form. DLC types talk bravely but vaguely about "new departures." Robb says that "for Democrats, reducing the deficit is more important than preserving individual programs." The double test for would-be reformers of the party is to specify what old programs they are actually prepared to abandon, and what new initiatives they propose that can truly be called progressive.

The Democrats had, in tax reform, the perfect issue for combining the Robb theme of sweeping away encrusted habits of government with the Cuomo theme of taking from the rich and giving to the poor. It started out as a Democratic idea. But Democrats lost their nerve. Walter Mondale didn't take it up in the 1984 election, and President Reagan stole it soon afterward.

What is the next opportunity like that one? Democrats of all stripes seem to think it's trade. The DLC types believe they can package protectionism as industrial policy: an activist government marshaling the nation's resources for growth. Cuomo, of course, presents it as grievance: "Japan's industrial and trade policies threaten our future."

Since throwing up a lot of new trade barriers would, in fact, be an economic catastrophe, here's an alternative: lower the FICA tax and the Social Security benefits it pays for. Robb, to his credit, has touched on this in speeches. "There is a trade-off between expanding benefits for retired workers and raising a regressive payroll tax on today's workers," he has said. "That tax hits the working poor even harder than income taxes and frequently discourages small businesses from hiring new workers." With understandable nervousness, he urges that we "consider all our options," but he explicitly mentions options that would reduce benefits for some people.

If Democrats want to reinvigorate their progressive vision, rather than embalm it or abandon it, here is an opportunity. Or will they let the Republicans steal this one, too?

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CORRESPONDENCE

UNFUNNY FARM

To the editors:

I came across your article in which you accuse Gore Vidal of "anti-Semitism" and proceed to insult him viciously ("Patriotic Gore," April 28). The final sentence reads: "This man is ready for the funny farm."

I resent the fact that you equate "anti-Semitism" with insanity. In the first place, Gore Vidal is anti-Zionist, not anti-Jewish, and in the second place, being opposed to Zionism (which is both racist and militaristic) is not a sign of mental illness. If anything, it is patriotic.

The term "funny farm" is not funny. It is derogatory, and using such phrases makes you, not Gore Vidal, sound twisted. The easiest way to defame someone and his opinions is to label him as "loony" and "ready for the funny farm." It happens to me all the time. The opinions of Gore Vidal and myself are just as valid as yours, and just because we disagree with you does not mean we are crazy.

JOHN HINCKLEY JR.
St. Elizabeths Hospital
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

It is impossible to recognize Gore Vidal's essay "The Empire Lovers Strike Back" (which appeared in the 120th anniversary issue of the *Nation*) in your editorial caricature ("Patriotic Gore"). By quoting his ironies out of context and as if they were meant to be taken literally, you purport to prove that his message is "racist" and "anti-Semitic." In fact your editorial underlines the reason it was important to publish his article. It is too often the case that when a gentile criticizes Israel or raises fundamental questions about the role of the American Jewish community with respect to it, he is said to be anti-Semitic (and when a Jew does it, he is said to be self-hating). Your ad hominem attack on Vidal should not be permitted to divert attention from the serious questions he has raised about the support some American Jewish intellectuals have given to Israeli and American imperial policies. Until such matters can be addressed fully, freely, and yes, occasionally even with irony, bite, and wit—however uncomfortable that may be for its targets—the prospects for a way out of the intellectual impasse that has encumbered thinking about the issue are diminished.

VICTOR NAVASKY
Editor, The Nation
New York, New York

The editors reply:

It may be that here and there is an anti-Zionist who is not an anti-Semite. But it will be hard to find an anti-Semite who is not also an anti-Zionist. Poor deluded John Hinckley Jr. doesn't understand this. It is not surprising, of course, that Hinckley would find in Gore Vidal's Via Veneto rantings about the disloyalty of American Jews to America some approximation of reality. (St. Elizabeths Hospital also once harbored Ezra Pound, whose literary talents did not preserve his mind from derangements about the Jews very much like those that now obsess Vidal.) But Victor Navasky is not deluded; alas, one cannot even console oneself with the kind thought that his degrading stewardship of the *Nation* is explained by his readiness for the funny farm. His pretense here that the Vidal article is a serious contribution to a weighty issue, rather than a screed evoking the most poisoned arteries of the European heart of darkness, is just another instance of the cynicism with which he panders to the chic anti-Semitism of the far left while reassuring this important constituency of his magazine that its ugliest impulses are expressions of courage and farsightedness.

CLARENCE'S CRITICS

To the editors:

U.S. Civil Rights Commission member John H. Bunzel has recently called upon Chairman Clarence M. Pendleton Jr. to resign. We were pleased to see that TNR agrees with Bunzel that "Pendleton has poisoned the national dialogue on civil rights" ("Set Set-Asides Aside," May 5).

Mr. Bunzel's public letter to Pendleton seemed to us a carefully worded and well-reasoned assessment of the effect Mr. Pendleton's flamboyant rhetoric has had on the national debate over how best to aid minorities. He is right to charge that Chairman Pendleton's dismissal of "the leaders of civil rights organizations as charlatans" has "too often stifled rather than contributed to the kind of rational and respectful debate of complex issues that is much needed today." From experience, we know that it is difficult, and at times impossible, to engage in such debate when epithets are hurled with abandon and reputations are thoughtlessly impugned.

Mr. Pendleton says that he has abandoned his combative style, and on April 8 he told the *Washington Times* that he had not made such comments in over a year. Yet in that same interview he reflected on the discussion of civil rights in America and said: "This is not a philosophical debate. This is street warfare." It is but the most recent illustration of why Mr. Bunzel's criticisms have our support. As he astutely put it, the chairman's "opportunity to make a significant contribution to the life of the commission has passed."

NATHAN GLAZER
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

GLENN LOURY
Institute for Advanced Study
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey

DIANE RAVITCH
Columbia Teachers College
New York, New York

CHARLES SILBERMAN
New York, New York

WHAT AILS MEN?

To the editors:

Dorothy Wickenden's article "What NOW?" (May 5) is well argued, but it repeats the errors of too many "friends" of the movement for women: it argues, as Wickenden's closing quotation of Felix Frankfurter indicates all too well, from the point of view of men. Like so many others, including, currently, Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Wickenden neither acknowledges that men have obligations and responsibilities in the matter of equality nor asks them to recognize those responsibilities. As long as wages and power are in the hands of men and they do not share the jobs and responsibilities of family making and home care, and as long as home care and family making are in the hands of women only, the hands of both are tied—and there can be no equality for women of any income level, of any race, of any community. The question is not: What ails women? It is: What ails men?

SEY CHASSLER
New York, New York

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THE NEW REPUBLIC
JUNE 9, 1986

SOUTH AFRICA'S TERROR

The South African government's attacks on the capital cities of Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Botswana are extensions of the Pretoria regime's war—a war not so much against the African National Congress per se as against the majority of the country's population. The relentlessly cruel system of exploitation and disenfranchisement known as apartheid is now, at long last, under enormous pressure both in South Africa and abroad. Even at this late moment, very little of that pressure takes the form of armed resistance, and almost none of it is terrorist. It is both surprising and moving that the freedom movement, despite all kinds of provocations and humiliations, remains largely nonviolent—a movement of Christian witness. The moral incandescence of this movement is what has persuaded even the most callous of governments to demand change in South Africa, and radical change at that.

The ruling National Party may be willing to make some symbolic concessions to the sensibilities of the Western countries with which it wants good relations. It is not yet ready to take the steps needed to move the country away from a form of social organization justifiably characterized as Nazi-like. That is why the government will not negotiate with any black leaders except in a framework that guarantees the continued domination of the white Afrikaner minority.

When the world was averting its eyes, as it did for more than a generation, that was a tenable position. Now neither the United States nor the Commonwealth will tolerate this intransigence any longer. As a result, it is five minutes before midnight for politics as usual in South Africa.

The raids on three of the country's neighbors are a desperate attempt to stop the diplomatic clock, even though this will lead to more intense internal protest, a heightening of the repression, and a deepening of South Africa's isolation. The Afrikaners would rather retreat to the laager than alter their ways.

They now claim that their assaults on Harare, Lusaka, and Gaborone are on the model of American retaliations against the terrorist regime of Muammar al-Qaddafi. Some on the left are making the same analogy, with the inference that Ronald Reagan is somehow responsible for this latest Pretoria outrage. The same folk are also comparing these South African actions to Israeli reprisals against Arab terror. But Libya has not even tried to deny its critical role in the international terrorist wars against innocents. And the various factions of the PLO, generously welcomed and facilitated in Arab capitals, have not been any more circumspect about their methods and goals. By contrast, the three African states have gone to great lengths to limit tensions across their borders with South Africa. They have done so despite the cost to their self-esteem and solidarity as black people. Moreover, they have carried on peaceful trade, out of necessity to be sure, with a country that less burdened governments are increasingly inclined to shun.

As for which African government is most responsible for instability in the region, there is none more deserving of blame than that of P. W. Botha. Botha's government has systematically violated the Nkomati agreement of 1984 with Marxist Mozambique, which foolishly thought it could buy some respite from South African-inspired turbulence by its indifference to the struggle against apartheid. But under siege from Pretoria, what real options did Mozambique have?

It is this struggle that makes the telling difference. An oppressed and hitherto virtually passive people demands elementary human and political rights. It is they who are the victims of terrorism. This is no verbal sleight of hand. We do not mean by "terrorism" the routines of apartheid. The South African regime has used real terrorism—random shootings into crowds, for example, and assassination of ANC leaders in exile—as just another casual tactic to maintain its rule, even when its victims were in their saddest and most quiescent moments.

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NO SALE

Every three or four years in this country we have another debate about Saudi Arabia. And each time it's as if we have never had the debate before. In 1978 it was about supplying the Saudis with F-15s. In 1981 it was AWACS. Now it is Sidewinder and Harpoon missiles.

It is, however, slightly shameful that this administration, after five years of experience with Saudi behavior, should try to replay the 1981 AWACS debate as if nothing had happened in between. In 1981 the administration argued that we needed to sell weapons to the Saudis (1) so that we could demonstrate our support of them; and (2) so that they could help us in the pursuit of peace in the region. The AWACS sale passed, and with it an extravagant demonstration of American support. And what about peace? The Saudi record on peace is even more complete now than it was five years ago. They were needed to support Camp David; they not only opposed it, they joined the subsequent Arab League ostracism of Egypt.

In 1983 they were needed to support the Israel-Lebanon peace treaty, which provided for Israel's (and Syria's) withdrawal from Lebanon. The treaty was George Shultz's greatest achievement up to then. With Saudi help, it turned into his most abject failure. Within hours after the Lebanese and Israeli governments had initialed the treaty, Shultz flew to Saudi Arabia for expected and promised support. The Saudis responded indignantly that no one would dictate their foreign policy to them. They were opposed, and they kept supporting Syria with huge subsidies as Syria went about systematically destroying the treaty. Similarly with the Reagan peace plan of 1982, and even with recent attempts by Hussein of Jordan to fashion a peace plank with the PLO.

On peace the Saudis have been clear: the peace they want is a peace consistent with their maps, on which Israel does not appear. The fact that the Saudis do not have the military strength to effect that disappearance is beside the point. They have the political will to support those who want to achieve this end. They have consistently subsidized rejectionism and they have systematically thwarted every American effort to promote peace agreements between Israel and its neighbors.

The other argument for the Saudi arms sale is that we need it to demonstrate our support for the Saudi regime. If the threat to the Saudi regime is Iran, and if Iran defeats Iraq and decides to march on Riyadh, $350 million of Sidewinders won't make a nickel's worth of difference. And if the threat is internal, Sidewinder air-to-air missiles are not much use for riot control.

Selling strike weapons of enormous sophistication is not a military decision. It is political, a statement of "support." But in that case what is needed, in the face of a Saudi foreign policy consistently adverse to U.S. peace efforts, is a statement of disapproval: no help, no sale.

If the Saudis don't get their weapons, we hear, they and other Arab moderates will lose faith in the U.S. and will turn to the Soviets. Evans and Novak play the tune at least once a month. We have heard the threat a dozen times, and it does not happen. Why? Because it is absurd to suppose that a conservative traditional Arab government like the Saudi monarchy, with an intrinsic aversion to internal radicalism, would consider becoming a Soviet client, with all the benefits (like power for indigenous radicals and barracks for East German security advisers) such an arrangement brings. Southern Yemen is a cautionary tale. The lot of the Saudi dynasty is cast with the West—with its technology and trade and economic dynamism—and the dynasts know it.

The word "moderate" is misleading. The reason Egypt, for example, is entitled to huge amounts of American support is not its professed moderation, but its actions. It signed a peace treaty with Israel. Occasional protestations of moderation by regimes like the Saudis', which remain firmly rejectionist, do not make them moderate and do not entitle them to expensive American demonstrations of "support."

The arguments for Sidewinder diplomacy are just as weak today as they were in 1981 and 1978. Weaker, in fact, because in the earlier debates there was a submerged economic argument: if we are not nice to the Saudis, they will punish us economically. The earlier arms sales went through because the Saudis were thought to be a new and rising economic power, with oil to dispense—which at the time was thought to be an act of beneficence—and cash to invest, also thought to be some kind of favor.

Today the Saudis are a broken economic power. The American petro-connection, companies and flacks living off Saudi trade, is in retreat. Now that the unspoken economic argument has dissolved, the weakness of the political argument is exposed.

At the last minute, the president withdrew Stinger ground-to-ground air missiles as part of the package. This attempt to salvage the arms sale was designed to give political cover to some Republicans who know the deal is a bad idea but don't want to cross Reagan. The Stinger "compromise" misses the point. Rewarding an anti-American Saudi foreign policy with any kind of arms is bad policy.

We can only hope that the large majorities that opposed the sales will have the stamina to override the upcoming, inevitable, and misguided presidential veto.

NOTEBOOK

□ TAX-REFORM WATCH: Senators Alfonse D'Amato of New York, Alan Cranston of California, Chris Dodd of Connecticut, and Frank Murkowski of Alaska are leading the charge to restore the IRA deduction to the tax-reform bill. To pay for this ten-billion-dollar-a-year item, they want to "temporarily" suspend tax indexing. It would be hard to think of a more insidiously regressive trade-off. Although millions of people have IRAs, the benefits are heavily skewed. High-income people are more likely to have IRAs, contribute larger amounts, and—since they're in a higher bracket—save more in taxes for each dollar

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they deduct. Indexing also benefits everyone, but the overwhelming benefit goes to low-income people. The standard deduction and exemption play a much larger proportional role in determining their tax burden than the tax burden of those who are better-off. To let inflation erode the value of these deductions in order to finance IRA deductions is the height of unfairness.

□ WHAT DID HE EAT AND WHEN DID HE EAT IT? The *Wall Street Journal* published a profile of columnist George Will (May 7) stating that Vice President Bush, about whom Will wrote a famous vicious column several months ago, had been Will's "occasional lunch partner." Will wrote a letter to the editor (May 15) asserting that he had told the reporter that "I could not recall ever having lunch with the Vice President." The *Journal* replied that the information about Will's lunches had come from his assistant, "and luncheon dates were confirmed by Mr. Bush's office." America demands to know: What is the true story? Is George Will covering up his lunches with the vice president? Or is George Bush exacting a clever form of revenge?

□ WHAT?

HIGH COURT BARS
A LAYOFF METHOD
FAVORING BLACKS

—*New York Times*, May 20, front page

High Court Ruling
Signals Support for
Affirmative Action

—*Washington Post*, same day, same page

□ HOW THE WICKED PROSPER: When the *Washington Post* ran Norman Podhoretz's angry and accurate rebuttal to Gore Vidal's recent outburst of anti-Semitic and anti-Oriental prejudice, it discovered that many of its readers were unfamiliar with the controversy. (See "Patriotic Gore," TNR, April 28.) There might have been some comfort in the discovery; it's good to know that the *Nation*'s lack of scruple doesn't land in too many hands. But then, on Saturday, May 16, the *Post*, for reasons known only to itself, proceeded to print Vidal's screed in its entirety. Will it reprint the writings of Louis Farrakhan or Lyndon LaRouche when next its readers seem puzzled by a columnist's criticisms? Indeed, why should their words be less widely read merely because they have not also been the author of bad novels? Perhaps the *Post* should reprint Vidal again, in case any readers were away for the weekend or had their paper stolen.

□ TNR LITERARY EDITOR Leon Wieseltier has won the first annual New Israel Fund award for outstanding reporting, for "The Demons of the Jews," his article about the Israeli fascist politician Meir Kahane and the Israeli right, which appeared in our issue of November 11.

THE PRESS

TONG WARS

THE SENIOR Administration Official stopped eating his gulf shrimp with caper sauce. He spoke in a conspiratorial voice, rich with front-page promise. "You know, I think there's going to be more to this summit than just economics," he said.

The six White House reporters who were buying him dinner at the best French restaurant in Honolulu—scratching for news during the leisurely prelude to the Tokyo summit—all stopped eating. "I think," the official intoned, "there will also be some talk about terrorism." Fooled again. For $360, the reporters came away with the sort of scoop they could have gotten palavering with a New York cab driver.

When the Reagan White House is on the road, the power lunch of Washington becomes the access dinner of Santa Barbara, Europe, or most recently, Asia. But the dinners are falling into some disrepute, as they increasingly reflect a new banality in keeping with the more tight-lipped and bloodless style of Donald Regan's stewardship.

The ritual began during the first term of the Reagan administration, when aides such as Michael Deaver and James Baker enjoyed sparring with reporters and leaking gourmet information as they ate gourmet meals. Reporters align into groups with colleagues who are parallel in stature but not in direct competition—called "tongs" after the Chinese gangs—and then compete furiously to buy dinner for the handful of traveling White House mandarins. A typical tong might consist of a television network, a newspaper, and a newsmagazine—NBC, the *Washington Post*, and *Time* magazine are an established group—or a group of newspapers from different geographic regions, such as the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Dallas Morning News*, and the *Boston Globe*.

On the trip to Asia, White House officials were lavishly wined and dined by the California seaside, Hawaiian lagoons, Balinese fish ponds, and in Tokyo tatami rooms, but usually left reporters with little more than advice on pheasant hunting and the check. The converse of the Washington power lunch now holds true of the access dinner: more is going into the officials' mouths than coming out of them.

Walter Robinson, the White House reporter for the

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Boston Globe, who is a newcomer to the ritual, is not impressed. "The Information," he says, "is marginal."

With the exception of Pat Buchanan, who rarely dines but was deemed funny and forthcoming over a Singapore Sling in Bali, the culinary exchanges these days are often so empty that some officials even refuse to confirm information that has already been printed.

"There's something vaguely insulting about it," says Margaret Warner, *Newsweek*'s White House reporter. "You feel like they're taking you and you're letting yourself be taken. It's not that we want a quid pro quo, but we would like more give-and-take."

James Hildreth of *U.S. News & World Report* agrees: "All we want is a little guidance—we're not looking for the crown jewels. It's not fair for them to take goods and services without giving anything in return. The dinner concept," he predicts, "is going the way of the Edsel."

White House staffers showed on this trip that they have become adept at the art of the axiomatic. Asked what special security measures were being taken in light of fears about Libyan terrorist attacks, an official reluctantly replied: "Off the record? O.K. Security is much tighter."

Asked for the latest scuttlebutt about Nancy Reagan, a White House aide confided: "She has influence over the president. He listens to her." Another official said, sotto voce: "I can tell you this about Nancy: she's in a good mood."

They may not be quite so bold as Michael Deaver, who used to call reporters before dinner to make sure the restaurant's wine list was up to snuff. But the Reganites seem to feel no shame about not singing for their supper. One top official—who dines so often he has been nicknamed "America's Guest," and who likes to bring along his wife and teenage son to dinners in Santa Barbara—once requested a place with a floor show to amuse his son.

"It's getting to be," sighs a woman who is a White House television correspondent, "like a really bad date."

OFFICIALS HAVE even started getting huffy when reporters try to steer the conversation from their hobbies to hot political topics. Asked in Hawaii about the investigation into Michael Deaver's lobbying, an official sniffed: "I don't do Deaver."

The same official admonished a reporter on another recent trip for asking a blunt question about White House affairs during the hors d'oeuvres. "Your idea of foreplay," he told the reporter, "is probably taking off your shoes."

Although the bloom may be off the dinners, the press pack will probably keep paying for quite a while. "If there's a crisis," Hildreth explained, "it gives the editors in New York a feeling of confidence to know you're dining with administration officials—even if they're not telling you anything."

And certainly, the administration will keep tonging, if the conversation overheard in the Bali Sol Hotel between a couple of popular deputy White House press secretaries is any indication.

"I'm going to dinner," said Rusty Brashear.

"Wait a minute," called Pete Roussel, smiling seductively at a passing reporter. "Maybe we can get somebody to take us."

MAUREEN DOWD

Maureen Dowd is a reporter for the *New York Times*.

THE MONEY CULTURE

LUST TO LEND

A FRIEND of mine has become, almost overnight, a tycoon in one of the hottest businesses in the country right now—perhaps *the* hottest business. My friend does workouts. By this, I do not mean that he spends his time exercising to Jane Fonda aerobics tapes. I mean that he owns a company that cleans up after borrowers who have defaulted on their loans. Most workouts are in real estate. Companies like my friend's (Victor Palmieri, who salvaged Penn Central, is another big player in the workout game) usually take over a failed project, cut costs, spruce it up, and sell it. The object is to get a bank or a savings and loan association off the hook, to reduce its losses, or even to get the entire loan back.

Lately the biggest client of workout companies has become the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation, which at the end of last year held more than three billion dollars' worth of "non-performing" (a banking euphemism for foreclosed, or about-to-be-foreclosed) real estate assets. The FSLIC (pronounced "fizz-lick") acquired these dubious goods in its capacity as receiver of last resort for failed S&Ls. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, which plays the same role for commercial banks, has more than ten billion dollars in non-performing assets—although not all in real estate. A conservative estimate is that $12 billion worth of distressed properties are being carried on the books of banks, S&Ls, and the federal insurance agencies. Bank of America alone has more than one billion dollars' worth of the junk.

The workout business is the only happy consequence of a nervous affliction that has seized bankers over the past few years. Another friend, who is part-owner of a large savings bank in New York, calls it "the compulsion to lend." Bankers, who used to hem and haw and scratch their chins when supplicants knelt in front of their desks to ask for money, today are shoving it down the throats of practically anyone who will take it: "Here—have some! Now!"

It's not easy today to get turned down for a loan. At least once a month, I receive a letter asking me, please, to accept this or that Visa card, which carries check-writing privileges of $2,000 or $5,000 or $10,000. And I can write these

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checks, of course, whether I have any money in the bank or not. An S&L in Maryland wants me to accept a Lifetime Account, with a "personal, unsecured line of credit, up to $5,000, to use as you wish." These guys have never even met me. But, says their letter, "You are already approved! No lengthy applications to fill out."

Meanwhile, Harris Trust in Chicago is offering student borrowers a choice of a free duffel bag, a stereo, or a camera if they'll only be nice enough to take some cash off the bank's hands. "Bank of Virginia in Richmond," reports *USA Today*, "soon begins testing 'phone-a-loan.' Consumers will be able to apply for a loan by phone and pick up the money at any bank branch." Next year we'll be getting letters like the ones from Ed McMahon and Publishers Clearinghouse, asking us to borrow $3,000 and get a chance to win ten million dollars or a new bicycle in a sweepstakes drawing.

And why are bankers thrusting cash at customers—especially at real estate developers and small borrowers? Because it's practically the only way they figure they can make a decent living these days. Competition from the big investment houses and the lifting of federal ceilings on the interest rates paid to depositors have ended the cheap-deposit era. Ten years ago it wasn't unusual for a bank to pay nothing at all for most of its deposits. Today look at a typical bank, such as Washington's American Security: only $528 million of its $3.5 billion in deposits last year came from no-interest checking accounts. In 1981 the bank had only $132 million worth of money-market accounts and consumer certificates of deposit. In 1985 the figure was $663 million. And on those accounts and C.D.s, American Security was paying its depositors an average of over eight percent.

BANKS MAKE THEIR money on the spread (or difference) between what they pay out in interest on deposits and what they get in interest on loans and other investments. And to get more in interest, they have to make riskier loans—loans to people they haven't even seen, and pieces of loans initially made by banks far away (the source of the Penn Square disaster).

The banks' original response to competition from securities firms was to lend money to foreign governments and foreign companies. That approach was not too successful—even though few banks have actually written off many of their doubtful Third World assets. Today a bank like Riggs in Washington, which used to brag about its global coverage, is only too happy to list declining loan volumes in distant parts of the world. In South and Central America, loans outstanding from Riggs have gone from $133 million to $110 million in two years. In the Middle East and Africa, they've gone from $90 million to $51 million.

Big corporations are doing their own borrowing—with the help of investment bankers (who are quite another thing from the bankers I'm talking about)—in the commercial paper and junk-bond market. And a loan on the books to an oil speculator looks almost as bad as a loan on the books to Mexico or Brazil. So where do bankers, driven by the compulsion to lend, turn? Mostly to real estate developers.

Here's a test. Explain this progression of numbers: 4, 5, 10, 9, 9, 41, 47, 79, 110.

Give up? Those are the numbers of banks that have failed, year by year, from 1977 to 1985. More banks failed in 1984 and 1985 alone than failed from 1970 to 1983. Savings and loans are in even worse shape. Some 800 have merged or closed in the past five years. "Half of the S&Ls out there are brain dead," says one banker.

Despite a 20 percent vacancy rate for office buildings in many large American cities, banks and S&Ls continue to lend money to develop more. Two-and-a-half years ago, a certain Texas S&L had assets of $38 million. Today its assets are two billion dollars. "No one can grow that fast without making a lot of marginal loans," says the banker. "They just keep shoveling it out."

THE PROBLEM isn't exactly deregulation. It's deregulation plus regulation plus greed. Deregulation provides the pressure, the compulsion to lend, but regulation, or more precisely, the federal insurance system, provides the protection, the sanction, to make risky loans. Federal insurance removes the market pressure that would otherwise keep depositors from putting their money into banks run by reckless drivers and shady operators. Since virtually all deposits are covered by federal insurance, people tend not to be choosy when picking a place to put their money. Depositors go where they can get high interest rates. They couldn't care less about their bank's risky loans.

As a result, the safer banks—the ones that don't make risky loans—have no edge on their competition. Charles Munger, who is Warren Buffett's partner in probably the most conservatively managed S&L in the country, Mutual Savings of Pasadena, California, writes in his annual report: "The regulatory structure of the savings and loan business creates a competitive situation in which it is hard to make respectable profits through careful operations." Munger also notes that "the FSLIC account-insurance system causes payments of ever-higher amounts into the system to help bail out more venturesome savings and loan associations which become insolvent, with the payments being required despite the fact that Mutual Savings imposes almost no risk on FSLIC."

The other problem with the regulatory system is that it's built on an illusion. "One-third of the 3,200 surviving thrifts have zero net worth or are actually insolvent when analyzed according to generally accepted accounting practices rather than the more lax methods allowed by regulators," wrote Anthony Bianco last year in *Business Week*. FSLIC simply doesn't have the money to make these insolvent S&Ls whole, so it lets them continue to operate, with well-run operations like Munger's footing the bill.

But the worst problem of all is greed. Deregulation has opened new vistas, especially to S&Ls, which used to make mundane home mortgages. Now owners of S&Ls—who, typically, aren't even beholden to outside stockholders—can do practically anything they want. This means, in many cases, lending money to their pals for dubious real

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estate deals. Deregulation has also brought the opportunity for making a quick buck by selling your little bank to a bigger bank, perhaps in another state. Many banks today are owned by speculators, waiting for the bid from Citicorp that will let them retire in style. In the meantime, they dish out dough to their law partners and golf partners.

Bankers who hemmed and hawed and made borrowers grovel weren't sweet characters. They reveled in a false moral authority. But given the choice, I prefer them over the new class of bankers, who push loans as if they were drugs. Henry Kaufman of Salomon Brothers says that bankers today are too "transaction-oriented." They concentrate on the deal at hand—which is to say, they want to make loans the way that investment bankers want to make mergers. What happens after the loan is made is someone else's problem. In this case, ours.

JAMES K. GLASSMAN

Common men, left and right.

WHO OWNS POPULISM?

THE VOGUE of populism, that peculiarly American blend of the conservative and the radical, continues to grow. Republican conservative congressmen Jack Kemp, Newt Gingrich, and Vin Weber, among others, think they have a formula for a right-wing populism, called the Conservative Opportunity Society. Twenty-eight Democratic members of Congress, who are unashamed to run and win as economic progressives, have formed a left-wing Populist Caucus. The parties are outdoing each other to champion that stunningly populist cause, tax reform. Texas agricultural commissioner Jim Hightower, an authentic economic radical, swept some of the most conservative counties in Texas in the Democrats' May 5 primary. The three Senate Democrats who call themselves populist were the only three Democrats in 1984 to pick up Republican seats—Senators Albert Gore of Tennessee, Tom Harkin of Iowa, and Paul Simon of Illinois.

Is populism fundamentally liberal or conservative? The question was debated recently at a one-day conference sponsored by the New Populist Forum, a nonprofit offshoot of the Populist Caucus. As political analyst William Schneider and conservative strategist Kevin Phillips agreed, populism is "ideologically ambiguous": anti-elitist, economically left-wing, and socially right-wing. William Jennings Bryan, who began his long career as an economic radical and ended it defending religious fundamentalism, was the quintessential populist. As a political tendency, populism comes to the fore whenever large regions or sectors of the economy find themselves left out of a generalized prosperity and unable to cope with larger economic forces. Today that might describe farmers, industrial workers, miners, working mothers, small fry in the energy industry, and much of the Midwest and Southwest generally. No wonder populism is making a comeback.

Politically, though the Democrats seemingly have the more natural claim to populism, neither party really owns it. Neither is consistently economically radical and socially conservative. When Democrats emphasize their economic populism, culturally conservative small-town or urban Catholic voters are willing to forgive Democrats' more liberal social views, and vote for the Democrats on economic grounds. Conversely, when Republicans combine their usual cultural conservatism with some sensitivity to the economic needs of the common citizen, they can win the allegiance of the non-rich, despite their upper-class hard core.

Seen through this lens, the political turmoil of the past two decades becomes easier to interpret. In the 1970s, according to William Schneider, the Democrats strayed from their bread-and-butter economic populism and embraced both statism and the experimental cultural values of the wayward upper class—both fatally alienating to populist voters. The federal government, which in the 1930s was a vehicle of anti-establishment empowerment, had become the quintessential establishment institution. The Republicans meanwhile managed to contrive both an ersatz economic populism (an economic recovery based on military Keynesianism, tax relief, and a co-optation of progressive economic icons such as Roosevelt, Truman, and Kennedy) as well as a more overt appeal to cultural conservatism (religious and family values, jingoism).

The 1984 election was the apotheosis of this trend. The two Democratic front-runners both had a glimmer of the old populist economics, but both fumbled it. Gary Hart, with some help from pollster Pat Caddell, perceived a new economic out-group: the young. His slogan—"the future"—was a way of telegraphing empathy with the worries of the baby-boom generation that they might never live as well as their parents. But Hart failed to fill in convincing details, and in his haste to distance himself from Walter Mondale he succeeded only in alienating other, more traditional populist constituencies, such as blacks and blue-collar voters. Mondale, for his part, had the traditional constituencies, but he was so intimidated by the economics of budget-balancing that he failed to deliver anything for the populist voters save some old-time rhetoric and the promise to increase their taxes. And he was so beholden to the Democrats' own business allies that he failed to take up winning populist issues such as tax reform. Each leading Democratic candidate played to his weakness.

IN SHORT, the public-opinion polls seem to suggest that the Democrats need to move right on social and perhaps defense issues, but left on economics. But the big-time Democratic pols, reinforced by the need to raise campaign-finance dollars from the upper class, mistakenly decided to move right generally. And that would be a

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serious mistake, as nearly all the conferees at the Populist Forum agreed. Democrats seem to do best in elections when they stand for the economic well-being of the common man and woman.

Populism of the Conservative Opportunity Society sort will be very difficult for Republicans to pull off—unless Democrats concede them the playing field. As Thomas Edsall noted recently in the *New York Review of Books*, the parties have become more stratified according to class during the past two decades. Well-to-do voters have become more consistently Republican, and working-class voters have become more reliably Democratic. But lately Democrats have failed to give non-rich voters much to vote for.

At the Populist Forum, Newt Gingrich offered a good example of the hollowness of Conservative Opportunity Society-style populism. He tried to turn education vouchers into a populist-sounding issue, wondering why the elitist education establishment refuses to permit vouchers that would allow parents to send kids to the school of their choice. Good question, but if you take a closer look at the voucher issue, it turns out that most of the social programs that Republicans have cut to ribbons are vouchers: Medicaid, job training, rent subsidies, food stamps, day care. National health insurance would be the ultimate voucher. Republicans are all for vouchers, in principle, except when the time comes to pay for them.

Although President Reagan and Senator Packwood win populist points for embracing tax reform, the coming Senate debate will be instructive. Nearly all of the Gucci crowd, mounting a last-ditch effort to put back some loopholes, will be Republicans. If Democratic legislators can resist the fatal temptation to ingratiate themselves with interest groups, they can sit back and let Republican senators demonstrate just how populist the GOP really is.

The 1986 Senate election could be a godsend to Democratic populists, because it happens that most of the Democratic Senate candidates who stand a better-than-even chance of winning back Republican seats are well to the left on economics: Barbara Mikulski in Maryland, Tom Daschle in South Dakota, Harriet Woods in Missouri, Kent Conrad in North Dakota, Ed Garvey in Wisconsin, and Harry Reid in Nevada, as well as several longer shots. If several of these win, it will be a long time before we hear that Democrats have to move right to get elected. Because so many populists are running, a Democratic takeover of the Senate this year would have ideological significance well beyond its partisan significance.

Nineteen eighty-six will be a good year for Democratic populists in one other respect. Influence-peddling, Republican style, is back in fashion. Kevin Phillips observes that the Republican habit of running against the federal establishment falls flat this year, because they have become the establishment. He even offers Democrats their slogan: "Could you afford to hire Mike Deaver?"

ROBERT KUTTNER

Foreign adventures shore up Assad's regime.

SYRIA'S IMPERIAL DREAM

BY DANIEL PIPES

IN A SPEECH last February, President Hafez al-Assad of Syria outlined his policy toward the Golan Heights, the southwestern region of Syria that was lost to Israel in 1967. "If the Israelis work to put the Golan within their borders," he warned, "we will work to put the Golan in the middle of Syria and not on the borders." As the most overt threat in some years—it implied the annexation of all of Israel to Syria—Assad's remark prompted strong verbal responses from Israel. Syria, in turn, made further warnings. Events since then have only made Syrian-Israeli hostilities more likely, and many observers now speculate that the two countries are heading for war.

Just after the United States retaliated against Libya for terrorism in a Berlin nightclub, it became clear that Syria had masterminded the attempt to blow up an El Al plane leaving London. As evidence of Syrian complicity emerges, the likelihood of Israeli reprisal against Syria increases. But do Syria's hostile moves mean that it seeks war with Israel? Or is Assad indirectly trying to maneuver Israel to the bargaining table?

Assessing Assad's motives poses many problems, for the Syrian Arab Republic is one of the most tightly closed countries in the Middle East. Even so, two points stand out. Unlike Israel's other neighbors, Syria still seeks to destroy the Jewish state. As the Syrian foreign minister, Abd al-

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Halim Khaddam, puts it, "liquidating the Zionist presence" is the only solution to the Arab-Israeli struggle. Second, Assad's bellicosity results not from strength but from weakness. He depends on anti-Zionism to reduce the disaffection of the Syrian people from his regime.

DESCRIBING THE AREA east of the Mediterranean more than 50 years ago, the Syrian writer Omar Djabry noted the paradox that the region's distinctiveness lies precisely in the diversity of its population. With good reason, he dubbed ethnic heterogeneity the trademark of the Levant. In Syria, Arabic-speaking Sunni Moslems make up 50 percent of the population and minorities make up the other half. Islamic heresies—Alawite, Druse, Yazidi—constitute 16 percent. Christians, ten percent, divide into ten sects. Bedouins make up ten percent, and Turks, Kurds, Palestinians, and Shiites make up the rest. With a long history of ethnic hostilities, Syria could easily be engulfed in the kind of vicious enmities that have destroyed Lebanon.

Thus the fact that Assad and most of his aides come from the small, isolated, impoverished, and despised Alawite community has enormous importance. Born in 1930, Assad was the oldest of six brothers and grew up in a village not far from the Turkish border. On moving to the nearby town of Latakia in the early 1940s, he changed his name from Wahsh, meaning "wild beast" or "monster," to Assad, meaning "lion." He was only 17 years old when he volunteered in 1948 to help destroy the nascent state of Israel. He then distinguished himself as an air force pilot, rose quickly through the ranks, and by 1961 was an important political figure. As defense minister, he played a crucial role in the 1966 coup that brought the Alawites to power. He took power for himself in late 1970.

Before 1970 Syria experienced 13 coups d'état in 21 years. The fact that Assad has managed to remain in office for over 15 years says a great deal about his political brilliance. He turned a small, poor, and volatile country into one of the dominant powers of the Middle East. Henry Kissinger and Jimmy Carter, among others, have expressed grudging admiration for Assad's skills. But everything in Syria depends on one man. The country is likely to revert to its former instability once he leaves the scene.

The Alawite community numbers about a million people—12 percent of the Syrian population—and lives mostly in the fertile northwest of Syria. The Alawite religion dates from the ninth century and derives from the Shiite rite of Islam. Its doctrines share so little with Islam, however, that mainstream Moslems traditionally view Alawites as beyond the pale, as non-Moslems. In the words of a still-influential Sunni writer of the Middle Ages, Ibn Taymiya, they are "worse than Jews or Christians, worse even than pagans." Frequently persecuted, Alawites made their faith a secret and avoided contact with the outside world.

As poorly educated peasants lacking political organization or military strength, Alawites long formed an economic underclass. They typically worked farms belonging to Sunni Arab landlords, receiving only one-quarter of the produce. Alawites were so poor after World War I that they routinely hired out their daughters as domestics to Sunni Arabs in the cities, a deeply shameful practice among Moslems and Alawites.

When Syria became an independent country in 1946, it was naturally the Sunni Arabs who dominated its political life. Ironically, discrimination served the Alawites well during the next quarter century. Exclusion reinforced the Alawite sense of ethnic solidarity at the same time that it kept them out of the ruinous power struggles then raging among Sunni military officers. As Sunnis repeatedly purged one another, Alawites rose through the ranks.

This ascent culminated in February 1966, when a group of Alawite officers came to power in Syria's bloodiest change of government ever. In a coup d'état marked by hand-to-hand fighting around the residence of Amin al-Hafiz, the former strongman, Assad's support for the rebels was decisive in the outcome.

The impact of the Alawites' taking power can hardly be exaggerated. An Alawite ruling Syria is like an untouchable becoming maharaja in India or a Jew becoming czar in Russia—an unprecedented development shocking to the majority population. To make matters worse, the government imposed a socialist order that hampered the Sunni merchants but benefited the Alawites and other poor rural peoples. The new rulers also denigrated Islamic practices, eliminating instruction on Islam from schools and deriding religion as outdated.

ASSAD INITIALLY eased these economic and religious pressures on coming to power, thereby winning the goodwill of Sunnis. After a few years' honeymoon, however, the Sunnis were even more antagonized than before. Not only did Assad reintroduce socialism and atheism, but he initiated other policies offensive to Sunnis, such as lavishing large tracts of land on Alawite peasants. His 1976 alliance with the Maronites against the Sunnis of Lebanon aroused anger and fear among Syrian Sunnis, who devised dark conspiracy theories about Assad's intentions. They said he was preparing to break off part of Syria into a separate, Alawite-dominated state, and that he would then join with the Maronites and Zionists to repress the Sunnis.

Assad filled virtually all key positions in the military and the government with Alawites. An exact pecking order emerged: the most sensitive and powerful offices went to close relatives—two brothers, one cousin, two nephews, and a brother-in-law; somewhat lesser posts (such as the head of military intelligence) were occupied by members of Assad's tribe; and key military command positions went to other Alawites.

To oppose the regime, many Sunni Arabs joined the Moslem Brethren, an organization dedicated to establishing a government in accordance with the tenets of fundamentalist Islam. The Brethren began a campaign of assassinations against what they called the "Alawite terror state" in September 1976. Within three years their guerrilla warfare seemed on the verge of overthrowing the regime. In June 1979 the Brethren massacred over 60 cadets—almost

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all Alawites—at a military school in Aleppo, and in July 1980 they nearly assassinated Assad himself. Only a bodyguard who hurled himself on an exploding grenade saved Assad's life.

When it appeared his regime might fall, Assad responded with a terrible effectiveness. He made mere membership in what he called "the Moslem Brethren gang" a capital crime and pursued its members without remorse. In early 1982 Assad attacked Brethren centers in the city of Hama with 12,000 soldiers, almost all Alawite. After shelling the city for three consecutive weeks, leveling large portions, the troops were allowed to pillage what remained. Some 30,000 Sunni Arabs—a tenth of Hama's population—lost their lives. In the words of a government official, this city of 300,000 "was reduced to the status of a village." Pictures of Hama were then shown throughout Syria as an object lesson for Assad's other enemies.

THE HAMA MASSACRE won the Alawite rulers a new lease on life. But it did not make the Sunni danger disappear, as the extraordinary number of bodyguards employed by the regime illustrates. Assad has 12,000 guards for his personal protection, his top generals have 60 guards, and prominent apologists for the regime, such as the dean of a dental school and a professor of Arabic literature, have four. Even massive repression did not permanently break the Moslem Brethren. The numerous bombs that have exploded throughout Syria in the past two months are believed to be their work.

The Alawites, a small minority, know they cannot rule indefinitely against the wishes of more than half the population. To win wider support from the Sunni Arab majority without giving it real power, the Syrian government has tried several expedients.

It claims that Sunnis enjoy full representation in the government, and it is true that a number of senior officials, such as a vice president and the defense minister, are Sunni Arabs. But Syrians know full well who actually runs the country. They understand that a highly placed Sunni politician reports to the regime, not to his own community. Should he stray, the vigilant Alawites who surround him will forestall any mischief. That Sunnis are figureheads becomes apparent in times of crisis, when Alawite unit commanders carry out tasks properly belonging to Sunni generals.

The regime also tries a variety of appeals to the Sunnis—Islam, non-sectarianism, Pan-Arabism, and Pan-Syrianism—in an effort to bring them in. But embracing Islam does little good, for Sunnis do not recognize Alawites as Moslems. Nor does the talk about the abolition of sectarian communal loyalties bring Syrians together, for the Sunnis know that one small community dominates all the others. Nor does Pan-Arabism, because Syria's experimental unity with Egypt from 1958 to 1961 was a disaster. This leaves Pan-Syrianism—the effort to unite all the regimes that made up the historic region of Syria. Pan-Syrianism serves the regime as its only instrument for courting the Sunni population.

The observant traveler entering Syria for the first time is startled as he goes through passport control and sees a military map of the country on the wall, for this map contains several obvious anomalies. It shows the province of Hatay, a part of Turkey since 1939, included in Syria. It shows the Golan Heights under Syrian control, though it has been occupied by Israel since 1967. Syria's boundaries with Lebanon and Jordan appear not as international borders but as something called "regional" borders. Israel does not even exist on this map. Instead, there is a state called Palestine. And Palestine is separated from Syria by a line designated as a "temporary" border.

The map's inaccuracies reflect the Syrian government's profound unwillingness to accept the country's reduced size. They remember that until 1920 "Syria" referred to a cultural region that stretched from Anatolia to Egypt, from Iraq to the Mediterranean Sea. In terms of today's states, it comprised Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan, plus the Gaza Strip and Hatay. This larger area is now known as Greater Syria, to distinguish it from the Syrian state.

The present borders within Greater Syria date back only to 1918-23, when Great Britain and France divided the area into many new polities. The imperial powers created these polities with an eye to helping their friends in the area, most of whom were infidels. Palestine went to the Jews, Lebanon to the Maronites, small regions to the Alawites and Druse, and Jordan to a British protégé, leaving Syria to the Sunnis. The Alawite and Druse districts were later incorporated into Syria. In the eyes of Syrian Sunnis, these were all usurpers who excluded them from their patrimony, the whole of Greater Syria.

Although the goal of uniting all these lands into Greater Syria was for many years politically dormant, it did not die. Assad revived it in 1974 at a time when domestic tensions compelled him to find an imaginative new way to build bridges to the Sunni Arabs. Since then, the Syrian regime has explicitly but quietly directed its efforts to bringing all the Arab parts of Greater Syria—Lebanon, Jordan, and the PLO—under its control.

ASSAD UNVEILED his intentions for Lebanon in 1972: "Syria and Lebanon are a single country. We are more than brothers." By early 1973 Syria had acquired a decisive say in Lebanese politics. The outbreak of civil war in Lebanon in 1975 gave Assad new opportunities. By masterfully shifting support among Lebanese factions, he extended Syrian influence. In June 1976 Syrian forces intervened in Lebanon, where they still remain. Since then, any important meeting of Lebanese politicians—including the most recent peace plan—has either taken place in Damascus or involved Syrian officials. Syria has achieved its long-sought role as Lebanon's kingmaker, benefactor, and discipliner. "You don't light a cigarette here without Syrian permission" is reported to be a common saying in the Bekaa Valley of eastern Lebanon.

In 1981 a state-run Syrian paper called Jordan an artificial country and its monarchy illegitimate. The territory Jordan controls, it said, "is the land of Syria, a part of natural

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Syria." Assad followed this claim with a remarkably candid speech asserting that Jordan "was primarily established to dismember Syria. . . . The day will come, perhaps very soon, when the Jordanian people will regain their right to make decisions. . . . King Hussein will discover that we are one people and that his majesty was no more than a passing, dark, and rainless cloud in our historic march."

Assad exerts great power over Jordan by helping anti-government elements within the country and threatening to use his much larger military forces. Terror has become the principal means of intimidation. Syrian agents have attacked Jordanian diplomats in many countries. (See "The Untouchable," TNR, June 2.) Assad's ability to get his way with King Hussein was dramatically demonstrated in November, when the king wrote an open letter apologizing for Jordan's having harbored Syrian members of the Moslem Brethren. He also promised to throw them out of Jordan, which he did. Assad then rewarded Hussein with an invitation to Damascus, which was quickly accepted.

As for the PLO, Assad launched a campaign in 1974 claiming that "Palestine is not only a part of the Arab nation, but a principal part of southern Syria." In 1975 he proposed to merge the PLO's command with Syria's. Yasir Arafat refused, correctly seeing this as a veiled attempt to dominate the PLO. A similar offer made in 1982 was again refused. Assad caused a split in the PLO in 1983 and dominated the anti-Arafat faction that later emerged. This was organized in Damascus last year as the Palestinian National Salvation Front.

The special attention Assad devotes to winning control over Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinian movement makes it clear that constructing Greater Syria is the centerpiece of his foreign policy. This goal poses problems, however, for it contradicts the official ideology of Pan-Arabism. It also complicates relations with Lebanon, Jordan, and the PLO. Therefore, Damascus plays a double rhetorical game. When convenient, it denies any Pan-Syrian aspirations.

ALTHOUGH Greater Syria includes many regions, Palestine attracts most of Assad's attention. The reason is simple: there is no Palestinian polity—only the state of Israel. Israelis are not Syrian, not Arab, and not Moslem. Indeed, they are Jews, and anti-Semitism has become a powerful political force in Syria during recent decades. Fighting Israel now symbolizes Arab and Moslem resolve. Strength will be achieved, many Arabs believe, through its destruction. Anti-Zionism is the operative part of Pan-Syrianism.

Assad needs militant anti-Zionism for three reasons. First, minorities in the Arab world take little interest in the conflict against Israel. Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Druse, Shiites, Kurds, and Copts typically have more pressing concerns than whether Israel exists, expands, or disappears. So have the Alawites. Before coming to power in 1966, they ignored Israel. In a 1936 letter to the French prime minister, a number of Alawite notables (including Assad's grandfather) expressed solidarity with "those good Jews who brought civilization and peace to the Arab-Moslems, and brought prosperity to Palestine." Sunni Arabs spin elaborate conspiracy theories around the fact that Hafez al-Assad commanded the air force in 1967 when Syria lost the Golan Heights to Israel almost without a fight. Still in the same post, they note, he withheld air cover for Syrian forces sent to help the PLO battle the Jordanian government in 1970. Combining these past events with more recent Syrian actions against the PLO, the Moslem Brethren discern "an international Jewish-Alawite conspiracy" against Sunni Moslems in general and Palestinians in particular. Indeed, they claim that "collusion between the Assad regime and the Zionist enemy" underpins the whole of Syrian foreign policy. Assad tries to eliminate these suspicions by acting more implacably anti-Zionist than the Sunnis. While Anwar Sadat could lead his country's opinion on Israel, Assad can only follow.

Second, rejecting the existence of Israel offers Assad a way to appeal to Sunni emotions. Sunnis have a special regard for Palestine; they felt most aggrieved by Israel's creation and they expect to inherit Palestine should Israel be eliminated. Standing up to Israel offers them something to think about other than the regime's ethnic composition and its domestic politics. Anti-Zionism ties the majority community to Assad's government.

Finally, anti-Zionism provides a bludgeon to hold over Syria's neighbors and to enhance Assad's power in Middle East politics. Syrian leaders argue that as "the heart of Arabism and the lungs of the Palestinian resistance," Damascus has historically guided the Arabs. Syria leads the fight against Zionism, showing the way to the other Arabs, including the Palestinians, and correcting them when they stray. Continuing the fight against Israel permits Assad to impose his will on the other Arabs.

THE SYRIAN government has unique needs, and anti-Zionism provides it with unique benefits. Bellicose relations with Israel help Hafez al-Assad stay in power and extend his influence. Refusing to accept the existence of the Jewish state provides him with a foreign enemy to unify the country, to strengthen bonds between the rulers and the ruled, and to mobilize the Sunni population. It also helps legitimate the government, divert attention from domestic conflicts, and increase Syria's regional power. Anti-Zionism has a key role in the Alawites' desperate struggle to prevent Sunni Arabs from taking back the power that their numbers and psychology demand. The minority identity and unpopular rule of the present government impel it to depend heavily on aggressive foreign policies against all its neighbors, especially Israel. Thus it stays in the fray after Israel's other neighbors have bowed out.

Assad so much needs Israel as an enemy he is willing to endure whatever costs anti-Zionism entails, including military defeat and economic sacrifice. So long as an Alawite-dominated Syrian regime faces widespread Sunni opposition, it profits by seeking Israel's destruction. The implication is clear: the Arab-Israeli conflict will continue so long as Hafez al-Assad rules in Damascus. □

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Two colleges where higher education has gotten too high.

GOOD TIMES VS. GREAT BOOKS

BY PHILIP WEISS

"THIS IS THE TIME when things really go mad here. It's important to write about the croquet game, if you can, because that is part of the madness. Dotty, excuse me, may we have that darling picture?" Inside the tiny information office at St. John's College in Annapolis, Rebecca Wilson spoke in an excited whisper. Everyone at St. John's talked in daunted tones, which were hard to get used to after Brown University. At Brown they broke up a car with sledgehammers on the college green, mobbed "Funk Night" to dance, stayed up till 2:30 drinking. At St. John's students were doing the bunny hop.

I was on a tour of extremes: two schools whose curricula are at opposite ends of the debate over whether to get back to basics. At St. John's, which is built around 130 Great Books, everything is required. At Brown nothing is. Each school has made its curriculum into a religion, giving it a distinct culture.

Walter Lippmann called St. John's "the seedbed of the American Renaissance." Education writers regularly visit its campuses (there's a second St. John's in Santa Fe) to report that its traditional approach to the liberal arts "could help salvage the nation's troubled public education system," as the *Dallas Morning News* put it last year. Brown's attraction is different. "It's one of the USA's hottest colleges—maybe the hottest," *USA Today* said a year and a half ago, soon after the *New York Times* reported that it was "in many ways the most popular school on the East Coast." Brown is glam and flash. I went there first, of course.

It was April. Brown was then enduring its third global media event of the last three years, the prostitution scandal. The first two events had been happy. In 1983 John Kennedy Jr. graduated and was pictured with his mother and sister on front pages everywhere, a moment that crystallized the school's new reputation as the place everyone wanted to go. Then in the fall of 1984 Jason Salzman, a junior, came up with the idea that Brown should stock suicide pills in case of nuclear war. Brown said no, and soon Salzman was a press favorite, trotting all over the map to explain it, with Brown vice president Robert Reichley serving as his Sancho Panza: "I congratulate Jason for his concern with the future of mankind," etc. Reichley calculates, he told me, that the story reached 200 million people. A university vice president doing media ratings? Such is Brown, quondam doormat of the Ivy League, which managed to change its "position in the marketplace," as Reichley puts it, largely by selling its laid-back atmosphere to the press. We "turned up pressure on the media side," Reichley says. Getting covered is a Brown policy. The *Brown Daily Herald* prints rundowns of how much "good copy" Brown rates, and *Issues*, a student monthly, leads off a big issue on Brown's future with speculation about what the school's "image-makers" will do now, after years of "exorbitant media coverage."

All the ink has made Brown media-neurotic. With by far the smallest endowment in the Ivies ($300 million, something the press doesn't mention), the school seems to have stopped believing it was a poor relation only after the media said so, and as a result is always glancing at itself in the mirror for reassurance. The school's convocation speaker last September was Tom Brokaw. A recent appeal to alums to come take classes included photos of staff with captions such as: "Giles Milhaven, Professor of Religious Studies, guest on 'CBS Sunday Morning.' " Every quarter the administration publishes a tabloid called *Brown in the News*, packed with the latest, including stories about student stars Amy Carter, Vanessa Vadim, and Cosima von Bülow. A recent cover highlighted the visit by the "Today" show. There was a picture of President Howard R. Swearer getting comfy with Jane Pauley in front of space heaters on the green. It was hard to tell which one was the TV personality.

Stately, plump Michael Silverman led me down to the first floor of the Semiotics building. Semiotics is the hottest program at this hottest of schools. I had just sat in on Silverman's class, Semiotics 66, which the course book calls "Introduction to Cinematic Coding and Narrativity" and students call "Clap for Credit." Like so much in the Semiotics program, it was about movies. "An analysis of a film like *Flashdance* becomes perforce an argument for the validity of seriously studying bad movies," a student had written in a journal the program helps publish.

In today's class Silverman had discussed two movies, *Vertigo* and *Bad Timing: A Sensual Obsession.* "The blondness of Kim Novak is a produced blondness. A whiteness almost, given over to the spectral. I think when she's produced it's like the haze in *Body Heat*, a blurring of the text . . . like Garbo," the professor of English had said. "The man is permitted his impaled position within the text." The words piled up: Splitting. Blockage. Scopophilic. Slippage. Sexed male or female. Sadofetishistic. A space within the said.

I'd seen Silverman quoted in *Variety* about the film program, seen his name on an old poster from when Pinter had come to Brown. Now he was on the verge of a breakthrough: Semiotics was going to be incorporated into a new

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Department of Modern Culture and Media Studies. They'd even teach journalism (Silverman: "The discourses of journalism will be interrogated"). At a time when English and Chemistry were facing cutbacks, Semiotics was doing fine.

At Brown the academic program is wildly subject to trends. Leafing through stories about Brown, you find professors reflecting the media hunger of the administration. They say they know that a particular trend is "sexy" or full of "buzzwords," but that's what it takes to bring attention to a field.

"The straight traditional focus is no longer marketable. The university looks more kindly on those who venture out and do exciting things," says Nelson Vieira. A charming professor of Portuguese, he parlayed federal grants for bilingual instruction and promotions, such as an annual Brazilian film festival, into a Center for Portuguese and Brazilian Studies. In a converted carriage house not far away is the Center for Environmental Studies, including an Urban Environmental Laboratory where students get vegetables grown for them by the staff, wax self-righteous about composting, and study meters on the stove to see how much energy it takes to boil their coffee water. The latest hot spot? Maybe the new Program in World Hunger.

But if a student wants to major in, excuse the expression, Geography or even Middle Eastern Studies, she will find no building, program, center, or department around. She will have to go through a cumbersome administrative process to arrange an independent concentration. That's Brown—hit and miss. Last year when some students wanted to learn Arabic, they had to petition the school for a teacher. Meanwhile, the school boasts the only Departments of Egyptology and History of Mathematics in the country (though it lacks History of Science); Vieira's salsa duchy comes close to overlapping both the Center for Latin American Studies and the Hispanic and Italian Department; and off the English Department's gray belly hang two fat puppies, the programs in Modern Literature and Semiotics.

AT SEMIOTICS, Silverman introduced me to three of his teaching assistants, all of them undergraduates, and we started talking. Silverman twitted one of them for not being forthright about his commitment to "a radical transformation of the social." Then he had to leave. The teaching assistants began arguing about how revolutionary a theorist should be. "We have a huge investment in the episteme we are trying to disqualify," Lauren Asher said. "I might end up being a buyer for I. Magnin and fully inscribed with capital, without a theoretical guilt. I could be as effective there as anywhere else. The material is there."

I asked what investment meant.

"Investment has to do with one's particular stake and desire in what one reads," said Christoph Cox. "How one experiences social life is not just planar. It has different levels. Investment has to do with where I locate my political desires, my libidinal desires, in social discourse. Where I locate myself."

The other undergraduate teachers agreed, and then the third, Lincoln Shlensky, took me to lunch. Shlensky had spiky hair and wore European clothes, a white provincial blouse, a dark jacket, his socks down around his ankles. He was extremely handsome. A couple of people we passed commented on his tan.

We sat down in Brown's Blue Room, and I tried to get Shlensky exercised about the prostitution scandal, in which two Brown women have been implicated in a ring (one of them indicted). He said he didn't have a "moral" response but a "critical" one involving the media. Shlensky's response is a common one. Reichley did make an admirable statement to the effect that the women were apparently victims, but then (damage-control time) he laid into the press for focusing solely on the Brown angle of the story. Another top Brown official told me that much of the attention was "political"—right-wingers getting back at the school that harbored the children of Jane Fonda, Walter Mondale, Geraldine Ferraro, and various Kennedys. Meanwhile, the *Herald* letters column has been full of Shlensky's sort of criticism: attacks on the paper for printing the accused women's names. You didn't hear anyone saying: This is bad, did we do something wrong? The suggestion that there's a connection between the scandal and the open curriculum was angrily rejected, though Brown is usually quite willing to relate favorable publicity to how "different" it is.

THEN SHLENSKY reached into his briefcase and let me see some of the papers he was grading. Each was one page long and covered with type, edge to edge. They were all written in the same jargon I'd heard in class, and teachers' comments were on the back. Shlensky, who ate very little, explained that the No Margins requirement of the course helped "de-constipate" the writing process.

Later I learned that Shlensky is just one of many undergraduates who teach—something administrators are proud of. Reverence for the wisdom of the young is central to the Brown culture. Karen T. Romer, associate dean for academic affairs, talks of the new "structures of knowledge" students bring to the school. She says one reason Semiotics prospered is that Silverman realized "he could extend his own energies with this enormous body of student expertise in film." The original Prometheus of the student body is Ira Magaziner ('69), who is credited with originating the idea of the new curriculum 17 years ago, from which flowed all the other goodies (laid-back campus, lights, camera, action). Now *all* students are encouraged to steal their elders' fire. Occasionally to good effect: some students, free of the self-consciousness a more tradition-bound place instills, pursue highly independent, serious work.

The youth cult also makes Brown life highly distracting. Everyone talks about sex, beginning with the basketball fans pictured on the front page of the *Herald,* who seemed to have embraced Prostitutes as an improvement over Bruins as school nickname. Meanwhile, a women's group was putting out a magazine of alternative pornography; a women's committee was offering workshops on "Acquaintance Rape," "I Want to Stop Dieting," and "Who

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Pays for Dinner?"; the *Herald*'s weekend section was promoting "chocolate erotica"; and the campus was littered with Day-Glo leaflets saying, "We know 10 women who were raped last spring weekend, don't let it happen again." The sheets were unsigned, their questionable authority adding to the anarchic mood.

Where the youth cult seems truly damaging is in its trivializing power. Foolishness is in, seriousness is out. I know little about structuralism/deconstructionism beyond the fact that it's important in recent scholarship, but I was struck by how its most irritating qualities are, er, fetishized in Brown's discourse: the self-seriousness, the hatred of socially engaged do-gooders, the treatment of all "texts" as equal. For example, the administration wants to get students interested in fuddy-duddy Great Books. It does so by entreaty, distributing leaflets urging students to subject the books to "radical criticism"—"to 'open up' the seemingly 'closed' language of Dante or Kant, and to see what kinds of messages or paradigms are encoded within them . . . in today's world of competing media and multiple forms of expression." Which is to say, Kant gets to compete with *Bad Timing: A Sensual Obsession*. Who pays for dinner?

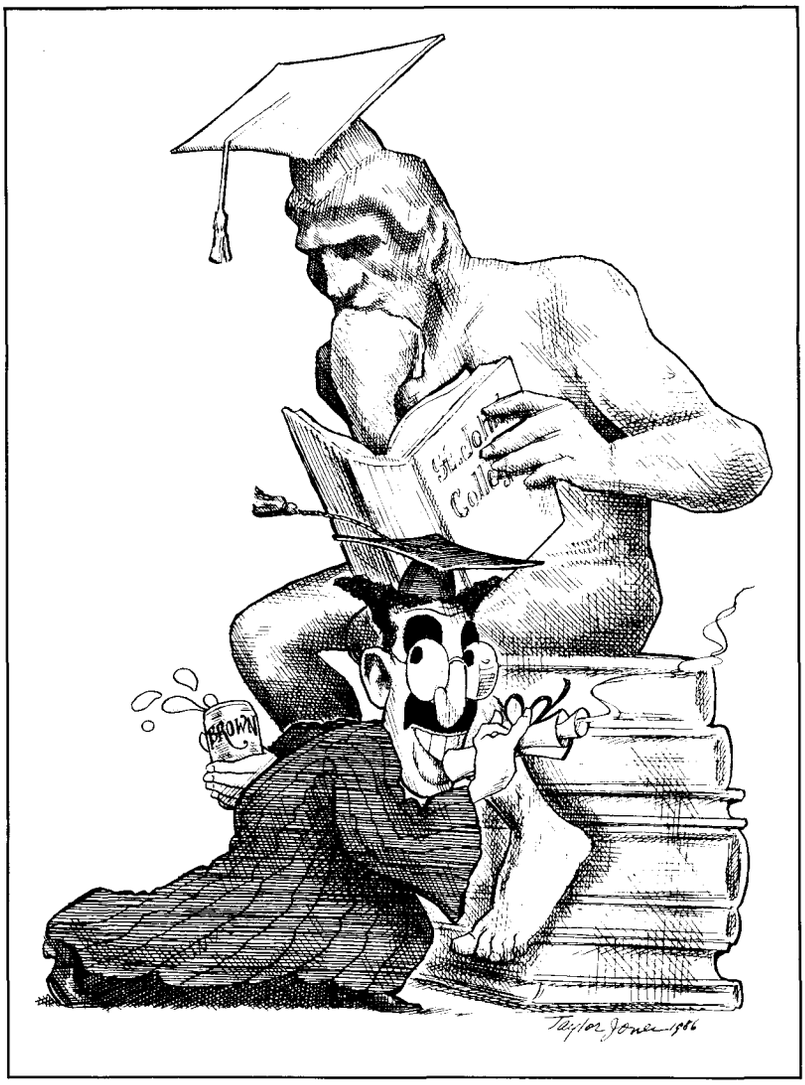
"It came to me in a vision. . . . It'll be the biggest video event to hit the Ivy League." Before leaving campus I arranged to meet the student who had uttered these words to the *Herald* and see his work. Ivano Leoncavallo was Italian and sanpaku. He shut the blinds in a classroom and for the next 45 minutes we watched "Jesus Jesus Christ Christ A Massive Crucivision," which featured seven video monitors mounted in a cross shape, and which had occupied his last year and more at school. I wanted to ask him about the countess he was maybe going to work for after graduation, but he kept looking at the screen so I stayed quiet.

Then it was over and I walked outside, following an urgent clanging noise across the green. A fraternity was demolishing a Pinto to raise money for a prep school. I wound up with a bunch of students who were drinking vodka and grapefruit juice out of several 32-ounce jars. I started an argument about how rigorous Brown is.

"You can't fail a Relistu class," said Joe Thompson.

Scott Flemming amended that: "If you wrote the paper, there was no way you could fail. If you put some time into it."

"Lighten up, Flemm, you don't have to put time into it."



DRAWING BY TAYLOR JONES FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

They were talking about a Religious Studies class. Thompson had been Flemming's teaching assistant. The two were also roommates.

"I got an A," said Flemming, a pole-like youth. "The T.A.s were invaluable during the exam."

People laughed. I asked about cheating.

Flemming said, "There were 500 people spread out over 30 rooms. You could sit anywhere you wanted. It was like a big think tank. There was a lot of whispering. They would lead you to the answer."

More laughter. That got us into an argument about the biggest gut. The winner was Music 2, "Rock 'n' Roll Is Here to Stay" (the title from the catalog).

"You could go to class and listen to the *White Album*," Bob Poole said.

"You didn't have to go to class," Thompson broke in. "I'd turn on the stereo and raise my hand in bed."

Nearby, they'd finally knocked the door off the Pinto. A fresh argument began over which bottle to offer me. Poole had a new bottle with no "scivies" on the rim—lip residues. I had a pull and talked to Rebecca Ensign, who told me that listing a Semiotics major on her résumé had proved a good conversation starter when she'd interviewed for jobs. "I'm still struggling with the theory," she said, but in the meantime she had landed a job at an ad agency in Chicago.

After that I sat under a tree to read through a stack of *Herald*s. A humor columnist had written about "dogs copu-

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lating on the green" and gone on from there to the question, "Did Chaucer lead an active sexual life?" I learned that Chaucer wrote "such popular treatises as 'Doing It in a Suit of Armor: A User's Manual.' "

Meanwhile, at St. John's College: "With *The Canterbury Tales* providing the theme, seminars were interrupted on the eve of May Day by seniors in medieval attire: knights, nuns, monks, a jester, a barmaid wench and lots of fair maidens . . . "

I ARRIVED at St. John's the very day that many thought the annual senior prank would occur. I sat in Rebecca Wilson's office and read through her Prank file. Two years before they'd taken "Prank" (referred to without an article) from Chaucer, and dragged everyone off to a court of sin and read charges. One tutor (as St. John's teachers are called) was accused of looking like a teddy bear, another of understanding the German philosophers, a third of knowing more Shakespeare than Shakespeare. And so on. Last year the seniors had taken everyone to an enactment of Euripides's *Bacchae*, modernized to include pictures of senior women in bathing suits.

At Brown they might set up a program of such offerings and everyone would steer clear of it as being too stuffy. But this was respectful St. John's, where people who believe we'll never approach the wisdom of Aristotle and Plato dedicate their lives to rereading them.

Prank, it seemed, was a subversion: seniors calling a halt to school business by bursting in on a great St. John's tradition, the seminar, held twice-weekly from eight to ten at night, reflecting the "ancient discovery that speculative loquacity flourishes after dark," as Eva T. H. Brann, a tutor, had written in the humble, grandiloquent language that many at St. John's employ. Prank punctured pretense (perhaps). If the St. John's program sounded repressive, Prank liberated it. "We do require all freshmen to sing together in the chorus," Brann had written.

That night Wilson had arranged for me to sit in on a junior seminar. But halfway through, a couple of seniors might interrupt, and after that anything could happen. "*This is the time when things really go mad here,*" Rebecca Wilson said.

I left Wilson's office and went up a slight hill to the heart of student activity, the Coffee Shop. A dozen or so students sat madly at their books, talking quietly. Nearby hung a sheet for students to indicate interest in "Guerrilla Seminars." These were seminars organized by students as supplements to college fare. *Death in Venice*, Hesse's *Siddhartha*, Plato's "Seventh Epistle"—really, it was hard to think of them as being that much different from the program they allegedly attacked.

This is the big adjustment of visiting St. John's: the common cause of students and tutors in the "dozens of earnest formalities" that characterize life there (I'm quoting Brann again). St. John's reigning spirit, the late Jacob Klein, is said to have bridled when anyone used the word "real" in a manner inconsistent with Plato's use. In classes students are required to address one another as Miss, Ms., or Mr. (and do so even in announcements for such activities as senior benefit piggyback rides). They leave no graffiti in the bathrooms. Music blaring from dorm rooms? At midnight I heard a group practicing on strings. A tutor reported that he'd heard *The Marriage of Figaro* (which is, of course, in the curriculum).

This docility has a lot to do with the college's rigid program, which at times seems aimed at exerting social control. Consider the extent to which a student's life revolves around the college. There are the seminars on Monday and Thursday nights. Attendance, as at all meetings, is mandatory, and because the 100 members of a class are discussing the same book in a half-dozen separate groups, many get together afterward to compare notes. "You get a Johnny at a cocktail party and he can talk about temporal things," Craig Nordin, a student, assured me. But not Friday nights, when everyone's expected to attend the school lecture. Recent fare: Kierkegaard, Marx, St. Thomas, Aristotle. The Q&A can go on past midnight. Saturday nights are free, but one junior proudly told me that at parties students sometimes use the message board on the door to explain the dialogue of Meno. There are, by the way, no telephones in dorm rooms, and three-quarters of the students live on campus.

St. John's also takes a different approach to press management than Brown. President Edwin J. Delattre recently stopped the pressrun of the *Reporter*, a university information office publication, to downplay references to the only newsworthy event at St. John's in recent years: the rejection of George McGovern to succeed Delattre as president.

The adjustment to this environment is hard, and many don't make it. By junior year those for whom St. John's is not the right place have left or been "disenabled" (told to leave). Self-selection is everything at the school, which each year accepts virtually all of its 250 applicants, of whom about 140 later show up and perhaps 100 graduate. It's inspiringly democratic, especially when you consider that Brown, which brags about accepting only one in nine, displays little of St. John's seriousness. The motivation of St. John's tutors is lofty: salaries, pegged strictly to seniority, range from $21,000 to $37,000.

"TNIMITABLE Miss Up-Dike. The key to the Castle is in your mailbox. Most Reverent and Faithful Follower. K."

Miss Updike was an important senior; this cryptic memo, chalked on one of the many blackboards on the Coffee Shop wall that only seem to add to the intensity and circumspection of St. John's life, was a hint that Prank was to take place that night. Later a student broke through the cigarette smoke and wrote, "Tonight's Opening Question: Is *It* tonight?" He was mimicking the form of the seminar, which begins with an opening question.

The first great thing about seminar was no smoke. A few years ago the college banned smoking in classrooms ("We were swimming in smoke," Wilson says). Otherwise, just as all midshipmen at the neighboring Naval Academy must wear white hats, a Johnny must have his Marlboro. There is even a "repertoire" of smoking ges-

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tures that go along with argument, one student told me.

Then, too, seminar was exciting. The argument was over whether Kant thought a person has free will to obey the moral imperatives he arrives at intellectually. All but a couple of the 18 students participated. The conversation was wide-ranging and almost always serious. At times it was hard to believe that 20-year-olds were speaking with the clarity and force of these students about philosophical issues.

"I thought there was a necessity to the sequence of natural causality."

"I don't think people will ever act on the basis of the categorical imperative. If you did, you'd never get out of bed in the morning."

"Is there any point in having a morality that has nothing to do with action?"

"The will can still give you *oughts*."

"Well, that's just great," someone said, almost in anger.

IT WAS St. John's at its best. "We deal in elements here, we get these students to see what the deepest issues are," tutor Elliot Zuckerman explained. Later I hooked up with one of the students, Bernard Langan, who seemed living proof of the St. John's belief in the unity of knowledge. He'd recently given a talk on sensory deprivation and tied experiments involving dark flotation tanks into Kant's theories of time and space and the passage in *Don Quixote* where the hero is trapped in a hole for 30 minutes and comes out thinking it had been for three days.

Langan's talk was, of course, outside the college program—and sparsely attended. For all its dedication, the place seems fearful of dynamic and omnivorous intelligence. Its spirit is one of humility, even abasement. The 130 books, everyone at St. John's says, are the teachers, and all the human beings there are sort of the Jehovah's Witnesses of the academic world—they worship the texts. So much so that, by one student's account, in discussing Ptolemy it's considered bad form to point out that the guy had it wrong.

Absent a critical and creative spirit, the primary impulse behind the St. John's program might be thought of as the need to "affirm," as one tutor put it in a memorial to a deceased fellow. "Criticizing, questioning, and negating" must be in "the service of affirmation"—or they're "a waste of time."

All the pieties one hears on the proper use of the mind make the place slightly stifling. After a while the cigarette smoke began to look like the cartoon variety, the kind that curls out of characters' ears when they're under pressure. No one acts out, except in stylized ways—like the way a senior, having just gotten through the oral exams for which he and his three examiners had put on formal robes in the Rare Book Room, hung his tie around his forehead. More creative or impetuous acts would surely be branded as vain or libidinous.

Libidinous? St. John's might be thought of as an intricate machine to draw off youth's wasteful passion. "I never get to talk about what I think about love. I always have to talk about what Plato thinks about love," is a freshman's complaint, according to the *Gadfly*, a student paper. Scott Buchanan, a founder of the St. John's program, is reported to have commented, "A sentence understood is more intimate than a kiss." And Eva Brann was said recently to have asserted that college life exists on the other side of a "hymen" from the outside world.

And no, Prank didn't happen that night. Afterward students said that they'd figured it wouldn't come off. For one thing (a variation on the old joke about Minsk and Pinsk), the seniors had tried so hard to hint it *was* Prank that of course it couldn't be. Also, the sophomores were discussing the *St. Matthew Passion* and the juniors Kant. Seniors knew better than to disrupt such important seminars. Then, too, prospective freshmen had been seen touring campus that day; the admissions office wouldn't have booked visits if Prank was in the offing.

Wait—was the admissions office in on Prank?

Oh, yes. And not just admissions, but security, the facilities coordinator (to arrange auditorium use), and the food services. Seniors prepare a meal the day after Prank; the kitchen gets the day off.

Prank, then, wasn't a prank. It was another St. John's tradition. Was it really such a surprise later, reading through Wilson's Prank file, to learn that Prank actually originated with a former college president, who'd challenged students "to come up with a decent prank"?

It's understandable. Having seen how effective the lockstep curriculum is, the college must occasionally fret about the effects of this social order on youth. "We worry about the amount of spoon-feeding and hand-holding our students absorb," Eva Brann wrote. If they really do worry, then it had to have been with pride tinged by concern that adults there learned of a recent all-night party staged by 25 students: reading Plato's *Republic* out loud, straight through.

EACH OF THEM overawed by the passions of youth, St. John's and Brown have responded in extreme ways. One school sublimates kids to death, the other hands over the keys and walks away. Or, on the bright side, one teaches students to take great ideas seriously, the other allows them to take themselves seriously. The objective of St. John's is clearly preferable. It's just that St. John's achieves it at what seems too great a cost. No matter how many reporters conclude it's what's good for America, you can't discount the bunny hop problem—only 250 students apply to St. John's each year. Some of the favorable press coverage must reflect the easy feeling on the part of many adults (including me) that if we had it to do over again, dammit, we wouldn't squander our youth.

But if my little sister were considering these schools, where would I suggest she go? Perhaps both. St. John's for the first two years to get a rigorous intellectual background, to develop logic, precision, articulation, and to gain some familiarity with the Great Ideas. Then, before the flame of creative, headstrong inquiry was snuffed by the marble fingers of the ancients: Brown, where she could do her own thing and go to Funk Night, too. Now, that would be a great education. □

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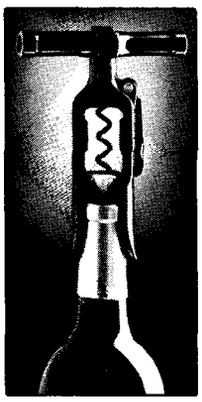

When a famous wine critic was called upon to uncork a $31,000 bottle of 1822 Chateau Lafite Rothchild, he *reached for a Screwpull* corkscrew. "It comes closer to infallibility," he explained later, "than any other device. The Screwpull involves no pulling. Plastic flanges fit over the top of the bottle, guiding the thin high-tensile wire screw into the cork. Handground screw has anti-friction coating for smooth easy action. As you turn, cork climbs out of bottle, in perfect condition, no trail of corkbits behind. The famous Screwpull is now available in a pocket model for travel and compact storage. Includes knife blade for foil removal. Removable handle fits over sharpened screw for protection and portability. **$16.00** ($2.95) #A1528.

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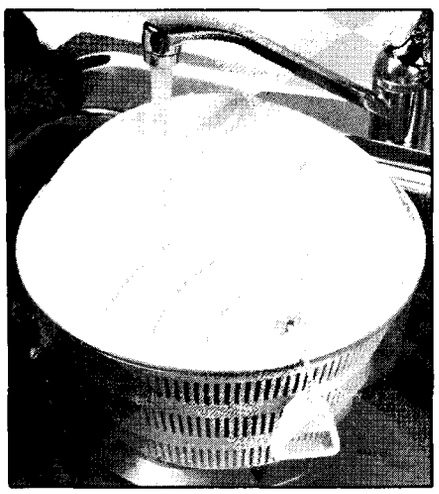

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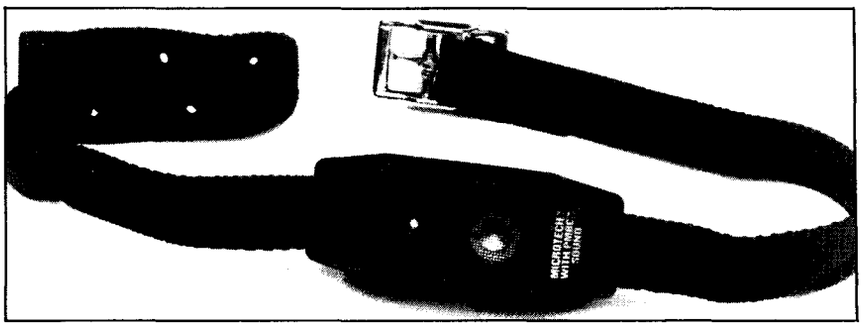
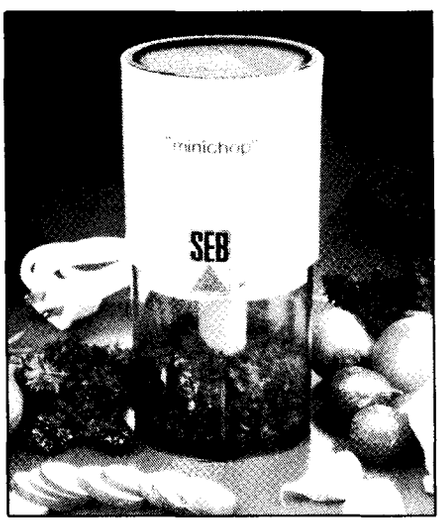


CHOP, CHOP, QUICK, QUICK



Food processors are great for big slicing jobs, but have you ever tried to mince parsley in one? You end up with a combination of chunks and parsley juice. From France, where mincing is an art and garnishes are *de rigueur,* comes the electric Minichop for all those in-between jobs that are too tedious to do by hand, too small or delicate for a full-size processor. The Minichop gives you fine even chopping for onions, garlic, fresh herbs; works on nuts, coffeebeans, peppercorns; even makes babyfood. It is simple to use and a snap to clean and costs **$32.00** ($3.95) #A1107. Now even chopping onions can be a labor you love.

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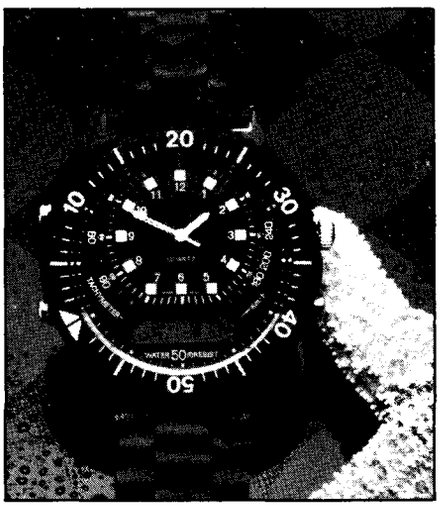

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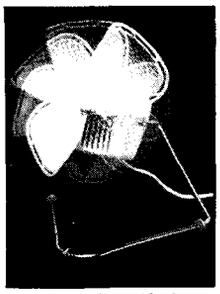

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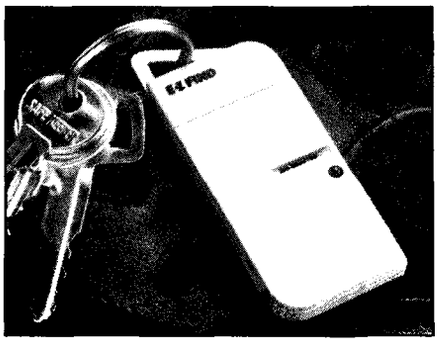

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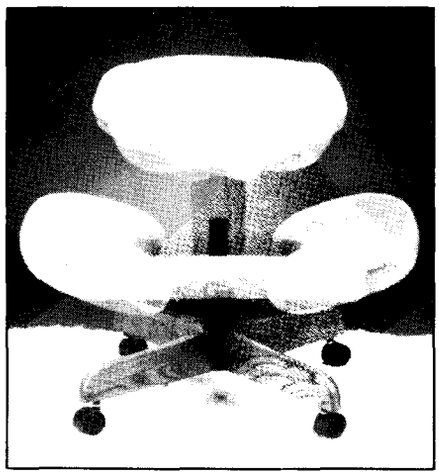

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STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

That Wild Blue Yonder

Films like *Top Gun* bring out the pharisee in many of us. We deplore the ethos that these films promote at the same time that, somewhere deep in us, we're glad that at least some people live by that ethos.

Top Gun is about the special training of the best combat pilots in the U.S. Navy. At the Miramar Naval Air Station in California is a master school to which one percent of the Navy's fighter pilots is sent for extra polishing. The school has a formal name; its sobriquet is Top Gun. Our hero, Tom Cruise, is a fighter pilot aboard an aircraft carrier in the Indian Ocean. He distinguishes himself in combat with some MIGs (unmarked with national insignia of any kind) and is then sent to Top Gun. He has various predictable adventures at the school with friends and rivals. He has a love affair on the ground, which, to make that affair mod, is not with a cocktail waitress or the commandant's secretary but with a civilian instructor at the school, Kelly McGillis. Excepting the contemporary equipment and lingo and the hints about the possible enemy, this film is basically the same one they have been making in refurbished forms ever since William Wellman's *Wings* (1927).

Top Gun
(Paramount)

Short Circuit
(Tri-Star)

But this is certainly not to say that *Top Gun*, any more than some of its predecessors, is boring. *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982) was boring because it concentrated on character and amour in the military world and did so with the clichés of adolescent fiction. Those (secondary) aspects of *Top Gun* are boring, too, but most of it is air stuff and is irresistibly exciting. A person who can be bored by a jet plane zooming off a flight deck or, better yet, swooping down to land on a deck that seems to right itself just in time—that person is my spiritual superior. The air tactics, both in practice and in the reality of the beginning and end, are so graceful, so charged with double danger—accident and defeat—that they are like floating lyrics of possible death. (It's after you find yourself thinking things like that last remark that you begin to get worried.)

Cruise is exactly what's wanted in the part. His chest always seems about to burst with energy, and he plays his range of scenes adequately. Anthony Edwards, the Radar Intercept Officer who flies with him, is the perfect action-film pal, reticent, reliable, sweet. (When Edwards's wife and small son turn up for a visit and we get scenes of family jolliness, we know that, in a picture of this kind, the pal's number is up.) McGillis, often looking her most lovely, is overqualified for her role. Both *Reuben, Reuben* and *Witness* asked more of her, which she supplied. Top honors in *Top Gun* don't go to the actors. As usual in this sort of film, the credits for the nonactors are about six times as large as the cast list. The director, Tony Scott, the cinematographer, Jeffrey Kimball, the editors, Billy Weber and Chris Lebenzon, together with their many associates and assistants and the people who did the actual flying and aerial photography, the sound and visual effects, are an all-star cast in themselves.

I'm awed by the complicated work in some pictures, sci-fi and others, that are made in studios. But to do this air stuff must entail generalship far beyond anything that C. B. DeMille ever dreamed: immense detailed planning, rehearsals that are radio-directed both from ground and air, photography that risks failures for all sorts of reasons that wouldn't apply on land, countless retakes, not because of muffed lines but muffed hundred-mile sorties. (The Navy itself, manifoldly thanked in the credits, is of course part of the cast.) None of the results is intrinsically different from those of many comparable past pictures, but here the air action is as complex as any I have seen, is well photographed and lucidly edited—we always know who is doing what—and is grimly beautiful.

What arises during the film, quite early and quite persistently, is a gnawing sense of hypocrisy. Not because of the violence: to tilt Dylan Thomas, after the first action-film death, there is no other. The discomfort arises from the state of mind on which the film is built and which it encourages, particularly among young people.

The young men in the film and their superiors are consecrated to standards, honored since prehistory, that seem increasingly isolated from other standards in the world. And although these men must have enormous technological knowledge and skill to operate their $30 million planes, they are apparently isolated from the world of intellect that produced the very technology they employ. The military life has never encouraged individuality or intellect or intro-

FILMS WORTH SEEING

My Beautiful Laundrette. Pakistanis in London today, mingling and non-mingling, succeeding and failing, loving and loathing. Discursive but humane, funny, moving. (Reviewed 4/7/86)

Shoah. Claude Lanzmann's nine-and-a-half-hour documentary about the Final Solution is now making its way to more cities, towns, universities. Shown in two parts, the whole is a monumental experience. (10/28/85)

Turtle Diary. Wry, intelligent game-playing. Two Londoners "rescue" sea turtles from an aquarium and take them to the Atlantic. Harold Pinter's script, from Russell Hoban's novel, is exquisitely played by Glenda Jackson and Ben Kingsley. (3/10/86)

Vagabond. Agnès Varda's intense yet calm chronicle of a teenage girl's wanderings and death in southern France. No explanations, just relentless observation. This, plus Sandrine Bonnaire's fierce-frozen performance, makes it gripping. (6/2/86)

SK

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spection; but the very means that are now put in the hands of the military underscore this difference from the world around that life. Thus it underscores the pharisaism in the viewer. Many of us shudder at the idea of living such a life or of the young people we know living it. But secretly we are glad, we must be glad, that at least some young people do it. Whether or not we approve of the recent raid on Libya, we would have to be absolute pacifists (I am not one) to wish that the armed forces involved didn't exist. Levels of outrage differ in us, instances of impulse to attack or retaliate; but even our dislike of violence would be different if such young men as Cruise and Edwards in the film weren't ready.

The fact that the script by Jim Cash and Jack Epps Jr. is only a retooling of what such scripts have been since the beginning of cinematic time is entirely appropriate. A screenplay that created complex characters, that put such characters in stories of experiential enlightenment, would detract from the real purpose of the picture. This film wants to join a line as orderly and ordered as the ranks of a military parade. It succeeds. So, schizoid to the core, we can deplore its filmic triteness and its mythology that war is a kind of super Olympics, and at the same time we can enjoy its physical-visual thrills and be privately glad that at least some young people take its standards seriously.

People are always—well, once in a while—asking me about films suitable for children. I refrain from answering "most of them, especially American ones" because most of them, juvenile as they are basically, contain rude language or explicit sex or exaggerated violence or all three. I don't go to many films designed for children, animated or otherwise, for what seem manifest reasons. But occasionally a film ostensibly designed for a general audience turns out to be perfect for children. I sat behind two six-year-old boys at *Short Circuit*, so I know what I'm talking about.

Short Circuit deals with a robot designed for military use that escapes and becomes a "person." (I saw it the day after *Top Gun*.) The script, by S. S. Wilson and Brent Maddock, seems to owe a debt to the "personalized" robots of *Star Wars*, but it veers off on its own. This robot, one of five that cost $11 million each, is accidentally transported out of the plant where it was made and ends up in the custody of a warmhearted young woman, Ally Sheedy. They become friends. Eventually they are joined by Steve Guttenberg, the genius who invented the robot, along with his sidekick, Fisher Stevens, an Indian from India, whose accent and mistakes are leaned on for comedy. After a lot of adventures, about as fresh and exciting as professional wrestling, Guttenberg and Sheedy and the robot break loose from the clutches of society to form a ménage à trois in the wide open spaces of Montana.

John Badham has directed with all the skill of a routine 1925 commercial director. *Short Circuit* was made much like the Saturday afternoon serials I used to watch when I was the age of the gents in front of me and which I enjoyed just as much as they did this picture. The idea of a high-tech machine developing a personality is not a dazzling novelty, but at least it's a relief from human beings coming to resemble high-tech machines.

MARK STEVENS ON ART

Connoisseurs of Classicism

Not long ago, while standing before a contemporary painting of people in togas, I witnessed an impressive act of criticism. A man walked up. He looked. And he sneezed. I agreed with him. There is something ridiculous, something banal, something deserving of nothing so much as a head-clearing sneeze, in painting that shamelessly copies the style of an old master. No less exasperating is work that, for example, updates the Crucifixion by dressing Christ in blue jeans or that offers the eye Central Park à la Poussin.

But there are artists, haunted by a memory of art before the modern reductions, who aren't epigones of the past. They study traditional craft, draw

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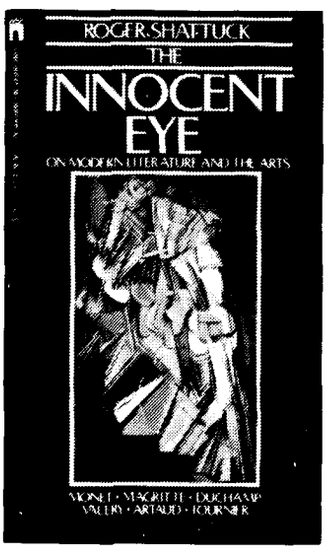
ROGER SHATTUCK

THE INNOCENT EYE

ESSAYS ON MODERN LITERATURE AND THE ARTS



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from the model, do not shatter the figure. They are clever enough to paint pictures more congenial to contemporary taste—and, in fact, often admire modernism—but they also regard late modernist art as one long, slow petering out. They think art might advance by reexamining what has been discarded. And frankly, they just love the old art, especially the conceptual and spiritual grandeur of classically inspired painting. There are some artists who must celebrate that love in their work.

In New York three artists working this corner of contemporary art—each very different from the others—recently had impressive exhibits. The Spanish painter Antonio López Garcia is much admired in Europe; Gabriel Laderman and Lennart Anderson, important teachers in New York, deserve wider recognition. (López exhibited at the Marlborough Gallery, Laderman at the Schoelkopf Gallery, and Anderson at the Rotunda Gallery in Brooklyn.) Even sympathetic observers often consider their painting—sometimes disparaged as "academic realism"—imaginatively wan. They suspect that it has too little to do with what being alive today means, that it represents, finally, a failure not of skill but of sensibility—or more precisely, of nerve. Has the artist averted his eyes from the difficulty of the present? Has he avoided the ontological problems of making a straightforward figure painting today? Has he used the past as a pretty affectation, a way to condescend to the present? In short, has he earned his right to the old masters?

THE HOUSE OF ANTONIO LOPEZ TORRES (1972-80), BY ANTONIO LOPEZ GARCIA
PRIVATE COLLECTION, COURTESY OF MARLBOROUGH GALLERY

In the case of these three, I think the answer is yes. Each, in his most ambitious art, has thoughtfully addressed great traditions: Anderson, the Idyll; Laderman, narrative painting; López, the metaphysical realism of Spanish painting. None is an important form-giver and none has transformed past into present with the imperial power of the greatest artists. So what. To hear modern music through old instruments—this, today, has a particular power.

Updating subject matter is the most obvious way to modify a grand old tradition. The huge cityscapes of López recall the panoramas of the late 19th century, with a touch of Impressionism here, a touch of academic technique there. But the city itself is hazy, modern-day Madrid, a place of almost featureless flats. When López does portray something old (an interior, for example) he does not show it in its youthful shine. He insists upon its present decay. Stained walls, cracked tiles, bent doorjambs—the past slowly dies before us. To be a connoisseur of this form of decay is itself, by now, a modern version of the picturesque—ruins, 20th-century style.

Gabriel Laderman has reworked the subject matter of conventional narrative painting. "The House of Death and Life" shows four rooms and a staircase sliced open to view, as in a dollhouse. The narrative is loosely based on George Simenon's detective novel *Maigret and the Spinster*. Instead of the grand march of history or myth, with its public lessons, we have the diminished logic of the detective, gazing into a dream-twisted, clue-ridden world of crime; in place of an ordered cosmos, a terribly precise doll's house. Where once there was myth, there is now the contemporary mythos of lurid psychodrama.

Lennart Anderson appears less modern than the other two in his subject matter. His still lifes, to be sure, may include tinfoil or a popcorn popper. But his large "Idylls" portray men, women, and children at ease in a myth-suffused landscape. Very old-fashioned, recalling masters from Poussin to Ingres and Corot. What seems contemporary is how unfinished these idylls are. A lovely air of indecision hangs about them. Some figures wear classical dress, others contemporary; still others are naked. They play a guitar, sail a toy boat, and dance, but few have settled into final form. An aura of timelessness is a natural part of any idyll, of course. But beyond this, the paintings themselves, already the labor of years, resist completion; and when completed will probably not look finished. This seems honest. How could the idea of the idyll be fully realized when the classical myths are no longer second nature? In Anderson a paradise is evoked, but not fully defined; old-master painting is celebrated, but as an unreachable dream. In one picture, a man playfully raises a child high above him, as if to glimpse the highest happiness.

Putting on airs is an obvious danger to artists who choose grand subjects, particularly when doing so runs against the contemporary grain. It's pleasant, in a bitter sort of way, to regard oneself as the last civilized man in a world of barbarians. This affectation shows itself most clearly in a mannered concern for technique, a showy facility, and a pedantic way with form. All three artists, on occasion, admire themselves too

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much. Anderson can seem precious as he refines and roughens and refines. López's "Washbasin and Mirror," with its sly tricks of perspective and delicious rendering—of, for example, the rust a razor leaves on porcelain—works primarily as a stage on which to demonstrate skill. Laderman lacks the facility of the other two, but can be oppressively learned. All three, as fairly realistic artists, also run the risk of becoming vulgar materialists, in love with only the surface of life.

BUT NONE falls regularly into these traps. The reason is that each has more serious feelings—call them metaphysical—to get into the paint. Not through subject matter, but through formal choices. These feelings, while eternal, have a contemporary inflection. There can be no more serious subject than joy, for example, when regarded with Edenic gravity; and Anderson, in painting an idyll, is concerned with pleasure and the place of pleasure today. This is best seen in his actual handling of paint. He shares with many modernists the conviction that the materials of art can be their own reward; he has a gift for rich color harmonies and the play of the brush. He manifests his love for the idyll by himself idling in the paint, refining and playing, no more obligated to finish than the figures are to go home. At times the paint itself seems more tangible than the people (another modern trait), some of whom lack the three-dimensional solidity of classical figures.

Yet Anderson is not quite comfortable with his facility, perhaps because the spontaneous joy of painting, without a simultaneous concern for structure, would seem spiritually lax. And so he struggles to perfect, to conclude, to give weight to the picture—to live up to the tradition of serious joy embodied in the idyll. He has not succeeded and probably does not want to. The quality of vagueness, of gorgeous unfinish, keeps the idea both distant and alive.

Laderman's dollhouse contains a contemporary kind of pain, best expressed through the behavior of forms. Just as the dozens of obvious clues—a bed like a coffin, a faceless clock, a knocked-over chair, a shape resembling a bat shadow—fail to solve the mystery, so the picture's visual conundrums hint at, and disappoint, our hope for a reassuring order. The precise relationships, particularly geometric ones, seem grounded in classical art. Yet these relationships, while evoking order, are almost all skewed. The artist plays upsetting tricks with perspective. He exaggerates foreshortening and makes heads very large (recalling the Balthus prints for *Wuthering Heights*). He turns a potentially orderly color scheme, based on the primaries, into a shadow world of horrid browns, garish yellows, and queasy pastels.

This is surely the nightmare of classicism. It displays a kind of lurid pedantry, a suffocating surfeit of thought. Order is ordered into madness; control tightens into terror. The admirable determination to justify each stroke aesthetically becomes the tyranny of conscience. "The House of Death and Life" is a fascinating work, but few will like it, because there is something bloodless in so artful a crime; and people require blood in a crime. We look at, we accept, we even welcome expressionist art partly because the artist cannot help himself. He lets down—explodes past—his guard. Here the artist has channeled explosive feeling into dollhouse melodrama and formal tricks, to be observed with detachment. Sentimentality is feared; the painting is locked up; the artist retains control. As an expressionist, this is Laderman's special distinction, for which most viewers will not forgive him.

LÓPEZ IMBUES his surface with a spiritual presence rarely found in contemporary art. Plenty of realists, of course, aspire to material marvels; they use trompe l'oeil or render details with a hard hyperrealism. López is more interesting. He lets time help. He spends years, even decades, refining pencil and brush marks. He works his sculpture no less intently. This labor over the visible world has a devotional quality. The paint develops memory. Time becomes tangible, and objects rubbed by years begin to glow. As in a Zurbarán still life, the artist has looked so intensely, so sympathetically—that, finally, the facts become miracles. This is particularly Spanish, of course. The great Spanish realists, even Velázquez, rarely settle for mere bravura; they must hint at other realms.

What captivates in López—what seems contemporary, too—is how perfectly ambiguous the spiritual presence has become. The smudge of a pencil line, a stain on the paper, a bit of glowing light may or may not signal the entry of something spiritual into the seen. In one large landscape a tightening of the paint in the sky could be of purely formal interest; or just a portrayal of the way haze congeals; or a mark of tran-

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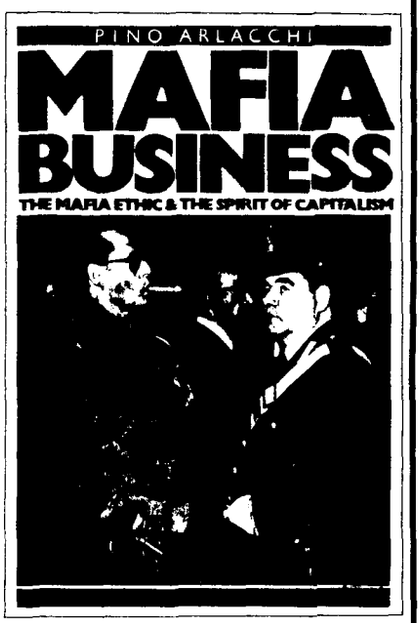

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scendence. The line between death and resurrection is no less ambiguous. A picture of a flayed rabbit on a dish illustrates every fact of death, from the scabbing blood to the limp envelope of fat around flesh. But the definition of space has a modern ambiguity, the arrangement of the animal in the dish is curiously gentle (reminiscent of the torso of a woman) and the glazed and milky eye looks out with preternatural understanding.

In López, handling and subject mirror each other. A beautiful drawing, "The House of Antonio López Torres," shows an old man stepping slowly, hunched, through a decayed interior. He is approaching the door to another room. There are delicate hints that to pass through is to die. (The other room has a religious painting in it and a luminous bed.) But what really arouses such uncertain speculation is the dignified play of light amid the decay.

It's easy to like the small works of these three artists. The scale of still life suits Anderson's subtle caressing of objects, his exact way with the finished and the rough. Still life also suits the analytical detachment—the troubling ratiocination—of Laderman. López's drawings are so true. But I admire the large works, not least for their reach-for-the-stars foolishness. These artists, while resisting nostalgia, can't quite forget when art was not just a hermetic manipulation of form, when it concerned itself with symbols more profound than, say, Coca-Cola. They are too serious, or naive, to treat the past with irony. They want an art of matter, that matters.

They play an essential modern role, that of crank. The crank is the person who has the courage to be himself, to resist the mass, to remember what's been overlooked. The crank is the marginal man, tinkering his way toward the angels. By invoking the past while remaining contemporary, these artists remind the eye of what's been lost in both technique and sensibility. Their failure fully to repossess certain values defines an ongoing problem in contemporary culture. That's success, of a modern kind.

GEOGRAPHER OF DELUSIONS

The News from Ireland and Other Stories by William Trevor

(Viking, 285 pp., $16.95)

The Stories of William Trevor

(Penguin, 768 pp., $8.95)

An Irishman who has spent his adult life in England, a Protestant born in southern Ireland a dozen years after the Easter Uprising (his birthplace of Mitchelstown then the heart of IRA rebel country), William Trevor has been writing for over 20 years about fanaticism. Or, more accurately, fanaticisms: he treats his subject not as an exotic phenomenon limited to a few "trouble spots," but as a commonplace mental habit taking as many forms as there are people who feel powerlessness or loss. Even when he deals explicitly with political violence (not often), he writes of its repercussions in the lives of people at some remove from it. He writes of a parentless Protestant girl, knowing only tolerance (as he did) in a Catholic town, and the embittered Protestant neighbor who tells her a baffling story of her parents' being "destroyed like pests" in an ambush meant for the Black and Tans.

Usually Trevor sounds more like this: "Quigley had seen her, he said, a week before her husband died, hitting her husband with a length of wire because he would not oblige her with his attentions." Seemingly particular to the point of eccentricity, this sentence actually contains the basic elements of Trevor's fiction: the mock-scrupulous "he said" immediately trampled by the detail of the report; inattention that triggers a cycle of pain and retaliation, and ultra-attention that elaborates an alleged fact into an interpretive scenario hard to swallow.

Whether the reader is meant to swallow it depends. Trevor's characters range from artless country servant-girls to a London antiques dealer with a racket; from West Indian immigrants to Riviera expatriates to a rural Irish clergyman whose daughter brings home a cockney parlor-Provo loaded for bear. Among them are hardened obsessives and sudden converts of every stripe, thrown up against zealous skeptics, rational minds out of their depth, and people who just don't want to hear about it. And they all spout stories: gossip, delusory extrapolations, highly colored public and private histories, and numerous failed drafts—frustrated attempts to arrange what they know in a way that sounds plausible. They use the words "truth" and "lie" more often than George Orwell.

"FACT" is a word that especially gives Trevor the willies. One of his stories begins, "For years, ever since she'd listened to Liz Jones telling the class the full facts of life, Eleanor had been puzzled by the form the facts apparently took when different people were involved." Even his plainest use of the word has a gingerly spin on it ("He was not a particularly clean man, and this was a fact he now thought about"), and his characters' arrangements of facts tend to go off like explosive devices:

> Barbara held out hairs that had been wrenched from the head of a boy called Bridle. She had found them in a wastepaper basket; Bridle had said they were his and had shown her the place they'd come from. She returned the hairs to a plastic bag that once had contained stockings. The hairs would be photographed, Barbara said, they would appear on the front page of a Sunday newspaper.... Milton Grange, turreted, baronial, part ivy-clad, would be examined by Sunday readers as a torture chamber.

The shakiest logic flowers with the most precise details. "*In vino veritas*," says a tipsy woman who, unhappy and neglected herself, is seized with sympathetic insight into the nature of a wimpy stranger at a party. "I daresay you're a pervert . . . , [a] chap who likes to dress himself out as a children's nurse and go with women in chauffeur's garb.... You are a homosexual." Others then act on the reality the fiction has acquired. "Heads turned.... He had been heard to cry that he was not a homosexual, and people had wished to see for themselves."

Trevor is a satirist of mental contortions. He's not a descriptive writer but

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an analytical one—an analyst of misunderstandings. He can write so touchingly of children's believing minds that when a boy comes to wonder "why my father was being described as a decent man," you're shocked to see the thought born in cold print. He can also write of people incapable of such a spontaneous thought, bogus to the core, like the man who fatuously calls himself "helpless in an emergency" and is proved all too correct when his mental processes are exposed: "He wondered if she might be Jewish, which would account for her emotional condition." The dynamics are the same—a cycle of ignorance and intolerance, as ritualized as a P. G. Wodehouse farce. Trevor once wrote an appreciation of Wodehouse, and it applies somewhat to himself:

> . . . his people insist on coming to life. They do so in sudden spasms or by acting out of character. . . . It all looks like a carnival of eccentricity in which anything can happen and often does. But there are rules, . . . the well-kept rules of a one-man band.

Trevor draws too much from life to be a one-man band, but he draws always to fit his scheme. His rules are a satirist's, technical and moral. He's a theme-and-variations artist, with one theme.

"THE NEWS from Ireland," the long title story of Trevor's new collection, is his primal story. From it has flowed all his earlier fiction—five volumes of stories, twice as many novels—and he's needed 20 years to be able to write it.

It takes place in Ireland in 1847-48, during the Great Famine, on an estate recently inherited by an English family named Pulvertaft, whose ancestor was granted the land by Elizabeth I. They now think of it as "home"; but the Irish Protestant butler, Fogarty, thinks of them as still "the Pulvertafts of Ipswich," wishing "he might speak the truth as it appears to him: that . . . they perpetrate theft without being thieves. He . . . has nothing against them beyond the fact that they did not stay where they were."

Mr. Pulvertaft is having a road built around the estate, employing local men whose families are starving; from the village comes a rumor that peasant parents have taken to the priest a child with the stigmata on its hands and feet. These two responses to emergency, one seeming practical and the other transcendental, are interpreted by different members of the household: the road as an act of charity, a nice route for a picnic drive, a continuation of the work of the Mad Dean Swift (said to have helped plan the original landscaping), and a "useless folly" that "leads nowhere and only insults the pride of the men who built it"; the child's wounds as a miracle, a superstition, an analogy to poor people eating their babies "like in the South Seas," and a fraud.

Trevor enters all these points of view, with conviction and satire gently fluctuating. Between them he scatters sparse facts, like crumbs: a damp cloth laid over a fruitcake, ice broken so birds may drink. The story tightens into a struggle between Fogarty and Miss Heddoe, the imported English governess. Heddoe believes in the road *and* the stigmata. Even when told the baby has died, its marks inflicted by the parents, she can't dismiss "what the people who were closer to the event took to be a miracle." But Fogarty hates her for being the "voice of reason" that dismisses as "drunk," "insane," and "ridiculous" the only thing *he* believes in:

> "If the estate had continued in its honest decline, if these Pulvertafts had not arrived, the people outside the walls would have travelled here from miles around. They would have eaten the wild raspberries and the apples from the trees, the peaches that still thrived on the brick-lined walls, the grapes and plums and greengages, the blackberries and mulberries. They would have fished the lake and snared the rabbits on Bright Purple Hill. There is pheasant and woodcock grown tame in the old man's time. There was his little herd of cows they might have had. I am not putting forth an argument, miss; I am not a humanitarian; I am only telling you."

This is a dream of the "ghost republic," as Conor Cruise O'Brien called it in a recent article in the *New York Review of Books*: "undying, or undead, as an ideal— . . . a republic of the whole island of Ireland, totally separate from Britain, . . . an ever-unrealized republic, for which heroes and martyrs died." Trevor prefers the less secular term "Paradise." In an earlier story, he had a wealthy widow die, willing the "Paradise" of her house and gardens to an institute "for the study of rare grasses." The butler, gripped by an idea, a devious speculative tale of medical negligence, turns into "some creature out of which a devil of hell had come," bullying the other ser-

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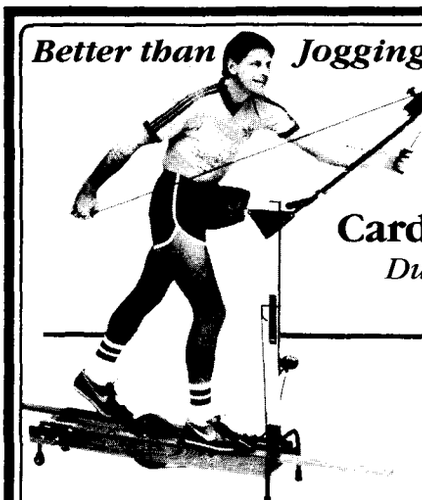

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vants into a blackmail plot whereby the doctor will "lose" the death certificate so they can bury the dead employer in the garden and live there forever. The doctor, stolidly hearing him out, concludes that "it seemed cruelly fitting that the loss of so much should wreak such damage in pleasant, harmless people."

This is one of the few times it's tempting to accept a character's voice as Trevor's own. In his only nonfiction book, *A Writer's Ireland: Landscape and Literature* (1984), treating Ireland as a place virtually brought into being by the interplay between physical facts and various fictions imposed on them, he came maybe as close as he can to explaining his role in his own stories:

> [The commentator] Giraldus of Wales visited Ireland for the first time in 1183. . . . He was not always accurate—indeed, so often the opposite that he might be dubbed . . . Ireland's first fiction writer. But usually, in his claims, he was simply quoting what others had told him, for his credulity was part of his storyteller's genius. . . .
>
> The cocks of Ireland, so Giraldus says, crow differently from other cocks. . . . Near Wicklow there lived a man who "had all the parts of the human body except the extremities, which were those of an ox." . . . In Dublin there was a cross which spoke.
>
> "The island is rich in pastures and meadows, honey and milk, and wine, but not vineyards. Bede, however, . . . says that it is not altogether without vineyards. On the other hand Solinus says that it has no bees."

IF TREVOR loves Wodehouse for his rules, he loves Giraldus for having no rules, for his "credulity." Trevor will listen to any damn thing—and not just listen, but deeply entertain it. This is what humanizes his satirist's strictness. He writes often about people who so abhor a lie that they can't hear the truth a lie may contain. Such people create a deadly silence. In one of his many stories set in prep schools (a natural breeding ground for oppressive and defensive simulations), a boy calling himself a "pocket Hamlet" insists his father murdered his mother to marry her sister; and a young Horatio, worried for his friend's mental state, tries confiding in a schoolmaster, Mr. Pinshow:

> "Do not lie, boy. I know a lie. I feel a lie on its utterance. Likewise, do not exaggerate."
>
> I knew then that it was going to be useless. It had been a mistake to come to Pinshow. . . . I said nothing, hoping he would not press me.
>
> "I see," he said.

Pinshow fills with his own fantasies the vacuum he's created, causing events to realign sadly with their Shakespearean source.

Fanaticism is fantasy turned aggressive. It's not always clear where Trevor's characters cross that line. He exercises our capacity to listen, to tolerate, to seek out the places where forgiveness might break the cycle. To do this, to invite us to entertain what these people say, I think he needs to remain entertaining—to give us his funny, beautiful, horrifying details. This isn't a question of seriousness; "The News from Ireland" contains his blackest joke, when the estate manager says of the peasants starved by the English Corn Laws, "Fraud is grist to their mill."

"Virgins," the richest of the other stories in the new book, is perhaps drawn from Trevor's teenage memories of Ireland during World War II—compared to England, a place of nourishment and safety. An Irish schoolgirl and her visiting English friend, in an idyll of moviegoing and food, both get crushes on a sophisticated, sickly neighbor, Ralph de Courcy, whose deceit causes them to deceive each other: a high-comedy take on the all-seeing, saintly invalids of literature. Most of these other stories, though, are thinner, their pleasures cooler and more abstract. A handbag stolen from an Italian tourist pays for a poor couple's fraudulent marriage; a mother obsessed with completing her dead husband's scholarly work—"an investigation into how, over centuries, the meanings of words had altered"—gives her daughter "the vengeful urge to destroy. . . ." Some stories occur in Italy, where Trevor has lived for periods since (he told an interviewer a few years ago) he thought it would refresh him to be "a stranger," "not to know a language." But maybe his optimum distance from home is the width of the Irish Sea. Or maybe, if everything you write is in a way the news from Ireland, you grow sickened at taking pleasure in writing about it—weary of it all, as the people who live there are.

Yet these are still the best stories around. And in two recent ones in the *New Yorker*, there's renewed joy in detail, and a familial emotion. The latest, "Kathleen's Field," is about a daughter sold by her family, everyone touched by guilt—all for an extra piece of land. The land is pictured as "the morning sun lingered on the heart of it . . . , the curving shape of it like a tea cloth thrown over a bush to dry." That small map can make you cry.

Trevor's characters crave credibility, legitimacy. (He's written several times about illegitimate children.) The implication of all his work is that no child, pervert, maniac, or fanatic, no one "confused," "silly," "senile," or "away in the head," should be dismissed as illegitimate, cut off from family or history. Trevor is a democrat without illusions, and each of his characters another precinct heard from.

VERONICA GENG

Veronica Geng is the author of *Partners* (Harper & Row), a collection of humor pieces.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MIND

Actual Minds, Possible Worlds by Jerome Bruner

(Harvard University Press, 201 pp., $15)

In 1960 Jerome Bruner co-founded the Center for Cognitive Studies at Harvard, and presided over what has come to be called the cognitive revolution in psychology. Behaviorism was expelled from its headquarters. Learning, recognition, language, and reasoning were to be understood by using abstract structures to model the contents of the mind. The ungenerous said that academic psychologists used to think of people as rats in mazes, and that the new wave decided to represent human beings by computational devices installed in the brain.

However unjust that canard, psychology's task in post-1960 Cambridge was to discover how the mind replicates regularities inherent in our material and social surroundings. Innate or acquired structures were postulated to show how

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children could so quickly grasp the basics for organizing time, motion, space, material objects, grammar, and logic. Other parts of our lives—compassion, grief, hope, puckishness, cruelty, boredom, pleasure—got little credit, or even formal acknowledgment. But Bruner, more than most of his colleagues, always kept a professional eye on such aspects of his other self.

IN 1962, just as cognitive psychology was sweeping all before it, he published *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand*. By day, his right hand did cognitive psychology. By night, his left hand pondered the ways in which people desire, share, and weave stories about each other. His latest book comes from the same source, now confessed in broad daylight but still seen as some sort of other half to cognitive psychology. Stories now loom large for Bruner. He does not think they are simply one among many kinds of things that people may or may not enjoy or create. They derive, he believes, from part of our nature and are essential to having a life, understanding our companions, getting on in the world. Hence he alludes much to novelists and critics.

But lest it seem that literary studies dominate the book, I should reemphasize that Bruner is still very much the cognitive psychologist. In fact, his new ideas are not so different, except in manner of expression, from what was once called "Faculty Psychology," the speculative science that tried to provide an account of the mind in terms of its distinctive powers. An old-fashioned list of the faculties might begin with reason, memory, and the will. Bruner seems gently to be proposing a faculty parallel to that of reason, and thereby parallel to much cognitive psychology. From the very beginning he writes of "two modes of thought." The mode for the right hand culminates in the sciences. The mode for the left finds its fulfillment in literature. We need both in order to become human beings at all.

Bruner is not some Luddite purveying the vapid truth that there's more to people than deduction and induction, and so refusing to reason at all. He's trying to say, rather, what our power of storytelling is, and how it works for us. To some his talk of two modes of thought may suggest stuff about the left and right sides of the brain, but happily there is not a whisper of that here. For others it may recall C. P. Snow's complaint, a quarter century ago, that British intellectuals live in two different cultures, one scientific, one literary.

Snow made only a local remark, however, about a time and a place. Bruner is pretty well talking about everyone, everywhere, bright or foolish, young or old. Indeed, the young get much attention, as befits the work of someone who has contributed so much to developmental psychology. For an infant to grow into a person, Bruner suggests, both the reasoning and the narrative faculties must be exercised. Lullabies and "Once upon a time" are to be taken seriously, not as ways merely to pass the time.

BRUNER'S title speaks of minds and worlds, in the plural. Of the surprisingly plural worlds I shall speak presently. It needs no stating that minds, including those of children, are plural—except in psychology, where lurks the picture of an infant trapped in solitary confinement, unable to communicate. Bruner, who is engagingly open, tells how hard it was even for him to break away from studying "the child as a lone agent mastering the world on its own"—*the* child. He has a good many interesting things to say about how "children grow into the intellectual life of those around them," in the words of Lev Vygotsky, the Soviet psychologist of the 1930s who became known in America just at a time when Bruner was becoming ripe for a social view of child development.

Bruner's increasing interest in the constant give-and-take of child development, and of the extraordinary way that children at once understand others, leads him to a topic with a businesslike title—"the transactional self." It is as if academic psychology were moving along the path taken by that second most dismal of sciences, economics, as it passed from the purely possessive individualism of the 17th century to the exchange theory of value of the 18th century. Our social life, and that of our children, is to be modeled in part by transactions.

Why are children so good at entering into transactions? Why are they amazingly good at getting along with, and "into," other people? What is it that children have to understand? Bruner answers in a word: intentions. For an infant to grow into the world, both reason and the narrative faculty are needed, or so goes Bruner's hypothesis. Reason is needed for figuring out the fairly material world that we inhabit. The narrative faculty is needed for people.

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not, for Bruner, the earth or the sun or the atom. It is *cause*, for the regularities that we perceive, and parlay into laws of nature, are all causal. Likewise the center of human worlds is not the soul, but *intention*. To understand people is to understand what they intend to do. Intentions acquire sense and texture in the stories that we tell, stories that make intelligible our lives and the lives of others. When I try to explain my trust of a friend or loathing of an editor—when I try to represent character or the lack of it—I do so with stories. Stories are for fiction and fable, yes, but also for reality—not only for the possible worlds of Bruner's title, but for the actual ones, too.

If we take Bruner seriously in his more outspoken moments, his opinion is substantially novel. One would have thought that we use stories to discuss people only as a kind of overlay on our deeper understanding of others. We report our sensibilities and intuitions in tales, but are they not formed prior to any story? On the contrary, Bruner seems to imply. In his account, stories are not something stuck on top of our feelings; they are their substance.

ONE MAY be a little unhappy with such a sharp distinction between reason and narrative; stories are filled with reasoning, while Darwinian theorizing is often compared to narrative. And no doubt I exacerbate the unhappiness by elevating what Bruner calls two modes of thought into two faculties of the mind. Bruner does indeed grant that reason and storytelling may have a common human seed, illustrated by animistic cultures that speak of the intentions of blades of grass and the coming storm in stories no different in kind from those they tell about the herdsman and the warrior. But that is not our world.

I'm not so sure, in fact, that it is so different from ours, but let us suppose in any event that there is a distinct bundle of abilities, of the sort that chiefly interests people who style themselves cognitive scientists, and which I cheerfully sum up under the head of "reason." It does seem that these abilities intermingle in stories, and that these stories intermingle in reasoning. It is as if Bruner really does want to keep his left hand separate from his right hand, where his right-hand concerns are defined by a Center for Cognitive Studies, which in turn defines what amounts to a human faculty.

Sometimes Bruner puts his case differently. Science, he tells us, is paradigmatic; for all its meandering paths of conjecture and speculation, there comes a moment when some questions are settled definitively. This is not the case with stories, with interpretation, with the reading of meanings into tales. That makes it sound as if we're back to the familiar contrast between reality and fiction, but that is far from Bruner's stance. According to him it is we who construct the paradigmatic "reality" of science just as it is we who write novels.

Bruner insists that both the regular structures of causation and the patterns of intention unraveled in our stories constitute the constructed worlds that we live in. He means worlds, in the plural, not only for tales but also for science. His slightly anodyne title speaks innocently of actual minds and possible worlds. One can't quarrel with that. There are several billion actual minds. They can imagine ever so many possibilities, each of which can, by a flight of metaphor, be called a possible world. We are, however, many actual people in one actual world—except that's not what Bruner means at all. He does not acknowledge a real, neutral, impartial world that we all inhabit.

Of course we do talk about many worlds. We are glad to retreat from the world of the factory to the world of the family, from the small-town world of parents to the world of the spouse or the merchant marine. Such talk is quite consistent with talk of one real world prized apart by science. But Bruner insists that there is no "given" even for the scientist to discover. We live in worlds that we construct, and that is as true for the laboratory technician at work as for the science-fiction writer at play.

Bruner has bought into a family of themes bandied about at present by some historians, philosophers, and sociologists of knowledge. He devotes a chapter to that wonderful philosopher Nelson Goodman, whose book *Ways of Worldmaking* shows, even in its title, the sort of thing that Bruner favors. But despite enthusiasm for philosophy and its kin, the use here is mainly negative. Bruner needs to fend off a contrast between reasoning and narrative faculties based on the claim that reason addresses a unique objective reality and tries to get it right, while stories thrive on imagination. Bruner won't play that game. There are many worlds of all sorts, and all are constructed.

Bruner's pluralism is serious. Given the drive toward unity in our lives and our knowledge, an admirer of possible worlds could still aim at one single synthesis. But Bruner has no desire for our reasoning and narrative faculties to conspire to produce one version of the world. "We construct many realities, and do so from different intentions." We don't *want* to make them approach each other, nor should we. Even when dealing with a single text, Bruner revels in the play of reinterpretation or even anti-interpretation of successive generations of thinkers. (In an afterword he rebels against recent articles by George Steiner and Tzvetan Todorov that argued that in the end there is one *Lear*, one *Marriage of Figaro*, upon which our traditions of interpretation converge.)

AS BRUNER'S worlds and meanings proliferate, the message should be: abandon talk of them and be concerned with what we do, with our talking and telling and guessing and inferring. Bruner wants us to think in ways not unsuitable for a cognitive psychologist about the practices that cognitive psychologists have in fact not thought much about. So the essays of greatest interest in this book are exploratory. Indeed, there is something charmingly reminiscent of the breathless high-minded sophomore in these pages. Bruner tells us how, 20-odd years ago, he would spend the evening not doing cognitive psychology but reading books or going to the movies. He fell "under the spell of Camus, Conrad, Robbe-Grillet, Sartre, Burgess, Bergman, Joyce," all de rigueur for the sophomore of the day who would also, like Bruner, not have said "movies" but "film." Bruner's youthful spirit added zest to the addresses and endowed lectures for which he wrote this material. His amiable reporting breathes life into ideas attributed to numerous people, young and old, who have attracted his attention. Read in the spirit of after-dinner conversation, the book is terrific. The promise of grander achievements will make some want to read it in a more attentive way, however, and they may be disappointed.

Still, there is promise aplenty. The book bridges disciplines, certainly, what with psychology meeting deconstruction and other beasts from the critical jungle. More important, it is an invitation to do a type of research that finds no natural home in cognitive science. There happens to be a famous precedent for those who would like to accept the invitation.

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Already Bruner much admires Kant for originating the notion that all our worlds are constructed. Kant is his model, but Kant's most famous book, his first *Critique* (of pure reason), is a work for Bruner's right hand, what with reason in its title and causation for its chief topic. Perhaps Bruner's left hand is itching to compose something parallel to Kant's second *Critique* (of practical reason), a book supposedly about a world that is not accessible to cognition, a book whose key idea is the will, or in Bruner's parlance, intention. Kant might not have welcomed a center for narrative studies as the place to work that out. But why shouldn't we?

IAN HACKING

Ian Hacking teaches at the Institute for History and Philosophy of Science and Technology at the University of Toronto.

ON YOUR MARK, GET SET, WAIT

Strategic Command and Control: Redefining the Nuclear Threat by Bruce G. Blair

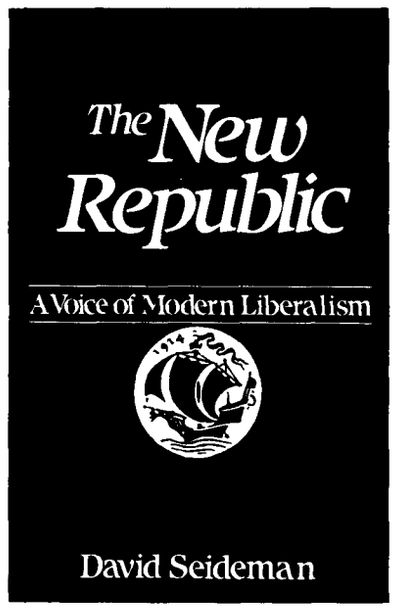
(The Brookings Institution, 341 pp., $32.95, $12.95 paper)

Despite the persistent and understandable public concern about nuclear war, analysts have had difficulty describing just how a nuclear war might begin. Much recent discussion has focused on the alleged vulnerability of the strategic forces on both sides, and on the possibility that one side would make a preemptive attack in order to destroy the other side's missiles on the ground. Such discussions are difficult to take seriously; no matter how intense the crisis, political leaders in Washington or in Moscow are unlikely to act on untested calculations about the vulnerability of forces, especially when both sides would clearly retain the capacity to destroy the planet even after absorbing a "successful" first strike.

In his extraordinarily important book, Bruce Blair, a former Minuteman launch-control officer, presents a description of how an unintended nuclear war really might begin, and a concrete proposal for reducing that danger. He focuses attention where it belongs: on the standard operating procedures (SOPs) of the Strategic Air Command, which controls most (but by no means all) of the alert nuclear warheads in the American arsenal. Military planners are, by nature, extraordinarily conservative; they develop war plans based on the worst case, and on the need to ensure that they will be able to perform their assigned task. But SAC, Blair tells us, is concerned less with the vulnerability of land-based missiles than with the vulnerability of the command-and-control communications systems that run between SAC and the president, and between SAC and the strategic missiles and bombers under its command. It is the SAC procedures for dealing with these perceived vulnerabilities, he argues, that could get us into serious trouble.

Critics of American nuclear policy generally argue that American doctrine calls for an attack on Soviet cities in response to a Soviet attack on the United States—what they label Mutual Assured Destruction, or MAD. In fact, the directives provided for SAC by all of the presidents in the nuclear age call for it to be able to attack a variety of targets in the Soviet Union when ordered to do so. Since 1961 SAC has been under orders to develop a variety of options to hit different sets of targets in the Soviet Union, and to be able to do so both before and after the Soviets strike. SAC planners have developed such options, and are confident that they could execute them successfully if they were permitted to launch an attack before Soviet missiles land on American soil. Since they have no confidence in their ability to receive orders or to transmit them after an attack, however, their plans simply assume that authority to fire would come in time to launch the missiles and bombers before they are destroyed on the ground. (Since the SAC commander does not have operational control over the sub-

Modern American Liberalism— at Home and Abroad



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marines or theater nuclear forces, they do not figure in his calculation of what procedures should be implemented.)

Here is the danger—and the key—to what is certainly one of the most likely paths to nuclear conflagration. The present operating procedures of SAC are themselves what might lead to war in a serious crisis, if something (such as the proverbial geese on the radar screen) leads the intelligence community to tell the president that a Soviet missile attack might be under way. I quote Blair's chilling description of the ethos of SAC:

> Strategic organizations . . . expect to receive retaliatory authorization within minutes after the initial detection of missile launchers. That expectation is so deeply ingrained that the nuclear decision process has been reduced to a drill-like enactment of a prepared script, a brief emergency telecommunications conference whose purpose is to get a decision from the national command authority before incoming weapons arrive.

CONSIDER carefully what this means. There is a crisis somewhere in the world. Soviet and American forces are on alert. Because of the way the forces on both sides are structured, a military alert almost certainly means a nuclear alert. The intelligence community is constantly being asked to assess whether a Soviet missile attack against the United States is on the way. Suddenly something happens that leads the intelligence community to reach the conclusion that an attack is under way. There are a number of events that could lead to this conclusion: the Soviets could have launched an attack, perhaps in the belief that we were about to strike; a few Soviet missiles could have been fired by accident, as a result of the lessening controls because of the alert; the American missile detection system could have malfunctioned.

The word that Soviet missiles are on the way reaches the SAC commander, and then the president. They have a conversation, perhaps through the Joint Chiefs and the secretary of defense. Blair tells us that the message from SAC would be simple and clear. Authorize a launch now and SAC can execute whatever option the president chooses. Wait until after the Soviet missiles land and SAC can guarantee nothing. It would not be able to execute the specific plans chosen by the president, and it might not be able to fire any nuclear warheads at all against the Soviet Union. The command and control of our forces is simply too fragile.

Perhaps the president would resist. Perhaps he would insist on waiting to see if a Soviet attack is on the way, or decide not to respond until after the Soviet missiles land. In any case we should not run the risk. The knowledge that the president may feel forced to act in haste—before anything at all is perfectly clear—simply because he may lose touch with his forces, should make us rethink our current procedures for handling a crisis.

BLAIR PRESENTS a solution that deserves to be high on the agenda of any individual or group concerned about the danger of nuclear war. The key is to change the procedures of SAC and the other strategic forces so that they are based on the assumption that American strategic forces would never be used for a first strike—or, just as important but much less commonly considered, for a quick second strike.

We must overcome not only the belief, well-founded as Blair demonstrates, that the command-and-control systems would not survive an attack, but also the imperative, virtually a dogma of nuclear strategy, to strike quickly in a crisis. The axiom that speed is important, that SAC must be ready to attack at a moment's notice, has been a key element of its doctrine from the start.

The original mission of SAC was to deter a Soviet conventional attack in Europe and, if deterrence failed, to force the Kremlin to call off the invasion. This was to be done by engaging as quickly as possible in a massive bombing of the Soviet homeland. It was believed that strategic bombing, which had failed in the past, would succeed because of the great destructive power of nuclear explosions. But speed was of the essence; the Soviets would have to surrender before they overran Western Europe.

Beginning in the late 1950s, a second rationale for speed developed. As the Soviets deployed missiles capable of reaching the United States, it was necessary to be able to launch bombers and missiles before they were destroyed. Later SAC planners came to understand that the vulnerability of the command-and-control systems added a still greater impetus to the need to fire quickly. Indeed, Blair reports that in the late 1970s an explicit launch-on-warning option was added to American operational planning, and programmed into the SAC missiles' launching program. Those were the years, too, in which the phony fear of a successful Soviet first strike became politically powerful, when it became conventional wisdom to think that either we use our missiles quickly or we lose them quickly.

Blair makes a number of recommendations for improving the command-and-control system and its ability to survive an attack, but his most urgent recommendation is what he calls "no immediate second use." Of course such a change will not come easily. We should not expect military commanders to make it on their own; as long as presidents may authorize them to launch strategic forces before Soviet missiles are launched, and certainly before they land on American soil, military planners will develop options for these contingencies. SAC has always prided itself on its constant state of alert and its ability to inflict damage on the Soviet Union quickly when ordered to do so by the president.

WHAT IS required is an explicit and emphatic change in policy on the part of the president, a clear and simple directive to the military. As McGeorge Bundy has recommended, in proposals that parallel Blair's, the United States needs to determine that it would never launch its strategic forces first or quickly second. The former assumption, again, is much less controversial than the latter. Blair provides a clear explanation of the consequences of such a directive:

> The response to impending or actual Soviet nuclear attack would initially be geared to ensuring the survival of the forces and command structures. Under current arrangements, protective dispersal and other survival actions are related organically to preparations for immediate retaliation. Under a doctrine of no immediate second use, survival actions would be separate from and would take strong precedence over counterattack coordination during and after a Soviet first strike. Authority to conduct offensive operations would be withheld for at least twenty-four hours, and military units would be programmed to operate accordingly.
>
> Because retaliation would be eliminated as an organizational priority during an attack, the main purpose of early warning systems would be to alert units to an impending strike and trigger preprogrammed responses that would minimize their exposure. Because early warning systems would not be required to support an early decision to retaliate, the United States could design them to meet the narrower requirements of organizational survival. Planned improvements in early warning sensors, computers, communications and so forth would be judged solely on the basis of their potential contribution to this objective.

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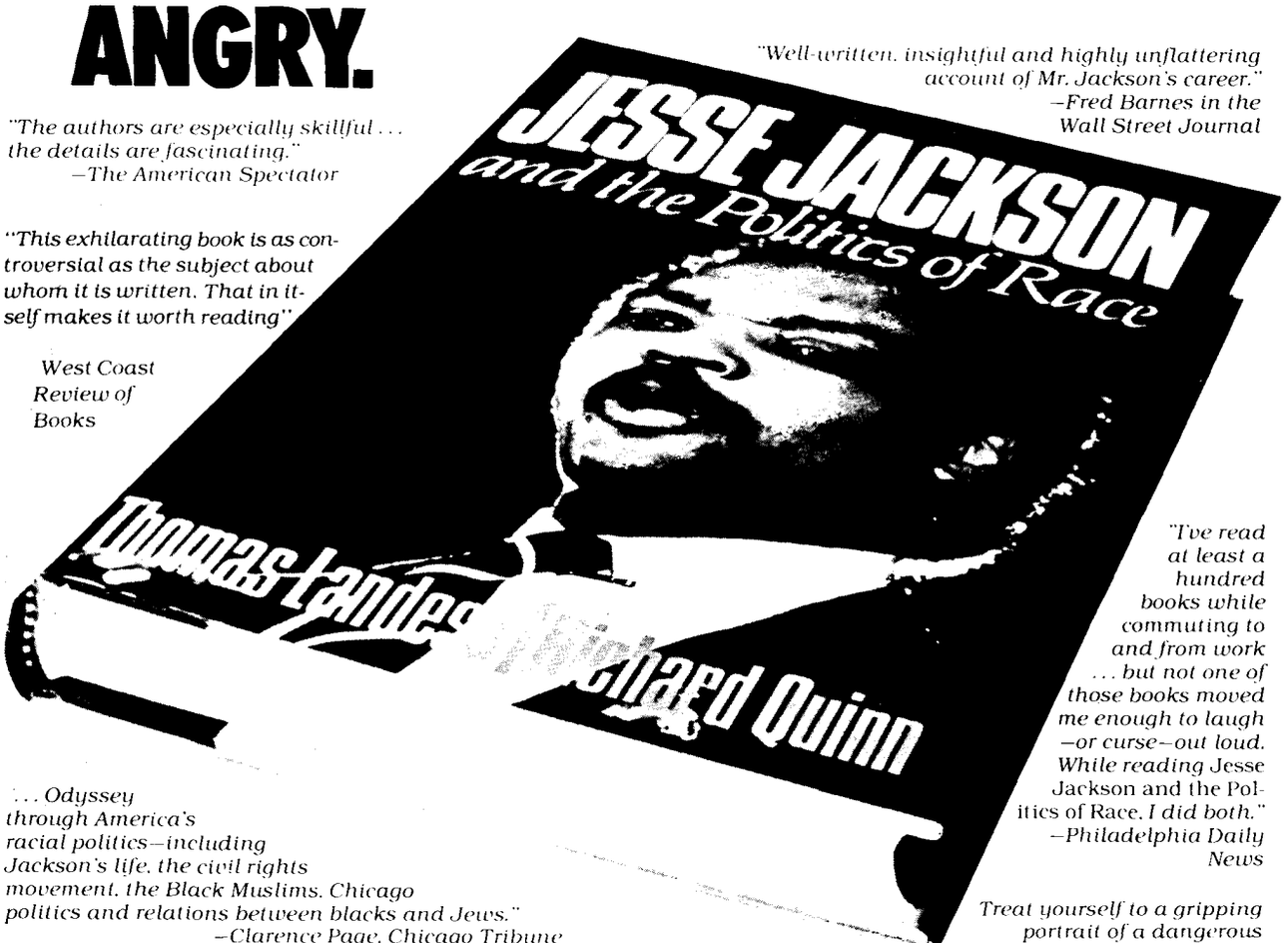

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As things now stand, the main preoccupation, in a crisis, of the commanders of the strategic nuclear forces is to get their forces ready to fire quickly. The steps they would take only increase the danger that nuclear devices will begin to be used. Some of those who understand the risk nonetheless wish to maintain such a system, because the risk itself will increase the pressure on both sides to resolve the crisis immediately. They believe that the conventional forces of the West are not a sufficiently credible deterrent, and that one cannot rationally or credibly threaten to initiate a nuclear conflagration. Hence they believe that the security of the West must rest, as it does, on a doomsday machine linked to a roulette wheel. The Soviets know that any provocative action starts the wheel spinning, and that one of its likely outcomes is a nuclear war.

But this risk is too great—and it is also unnecessary. The grim operational consequence of our policy is described well by Blair, who also provides a detailed historical description of its evolution. Blair notes correctly that a revision of this policy, a reduction of the difficulties and dangers posed by the dogma of speed by means of a reorganization of our command and control, can be accomplished unilaterally, without a new arms control agreement and without a reciprocal change in Soviet policy.

If we do not change the policy, if we continue to structure our forces and our strategy around the dogma of speed, we should at least recognize why. The United States has sought for 40 years to use the threat of the initiation of nuclear war as an instrument of policy. For more than 20 years—that is, since the Soviets developed a significant ICBM capability—the threat has lacked credibility, and we have relied on the doomsday machine linked to the roulette wheel. We have done so in the belief that the wheel will never start spinning, or that if it does, it will come to a stop benignly; and in the belief that there is no other way to contain the Soviet military monster.

Bruce Blair has placed us all in his debt by explaining how a different policy would lead to a much safer set of procedures for our nuclear forces in a crisis. Our ability to retaliate does not depend—deterrence does not depend—upon our ability to strike swiftly, but upon the survivability of our forces and of our communications. The worry about our forces is exaggerated. The worry about our communications is not. How we act on this particular detail of American planning could have as much to do with the survival of the earth as anything else any of us do.

MORTON H. HALPERIN

Morton H. Halperin, a former Pentagon and National Security Council official, is writing a book on American nuclear policy, *Nuclear Fallacy: Dispelling the Myth of Nuclear Strategy*, to be published by Ballinger next year.

FANATICS AND MACHINES

Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich by Jeffrey Herf

(Cambridge University Press, 251 pp., $29.95)

Nazism's experiment in combining modern technology with a fanatical and irrational system of beliefs is rarely thought of as a success, or as a way of organizing society that cannot entirely be relegated to the past. Quite to the contrary, it has typically been considered a unique and defeated revolt against modernity, a grotesquely nightmarish deviation in the history of the Western world. In both the scholarly and the popular imagination, Nazism and fascism, often interchangeably invoked, have become merely the most popular contemporary metaphors for evil. There has been scant attention paid to the relevance of Nazism's use of technology, which may shed some light on the current dilemmas of modernization outside the Western world—specifically, on the relationship between technological rationality and ideological fervor.

Jeffrey Herf's examination of reactionary modernism in Germany begins with a look at the conservative currents in the Weimar Republic, highlighting "the paradox of the embrace of technology by nontechnical intellectuals who were the inheritors of irrationalist and romantic traditions." Reactionary modernism may be best understood, like Nazism itself, as a response to the "disenchantment" with the world brought about by factors such as liberal secularism, bourgeois materialism, injury to collective self-esteem (caused by losing in World War I), and economic hardships. The major figures associated with this worldview, whom Herf discusses at length, are Oswald Spengler, Ernst Jünger, Werner Sombart, and Martin Heidegger, as well as Carl Schmitt and Hans Freyer.

OF SPECIAL interest is Herf's discussion of "engineers and ideologues." He helps to demolish the stereotype of engineers (and scientists generally) as embodiments and upholders of the kind of rationality that supposedly provides dependable protection against the temptations of illiberal ideologies. (Franz Neumann, for example, saw theirs as "the most rational vocation" and expected engineers to be the first group to break with the Nazi regime; but in fact they largely supported the goals of the state and its official ideology.)

Herf's final conclusions regarding the degree of success attained by the Nazis in reconciling modern technology with their ideological irrationality are not as convincing as the rest of the book. He writes that

> their anti-intellectualism caught up with them. The price to be paid for the reactionary modernist synthesis was severe: declining enrollments, reduced study time and a glaring deficit of understanding at the highest levels of the Nazi regime concerning the relationship between . . . modern science and technical innovation. In this sense, the reconciliations of reactionary modernism came up against the limits imposed by its rejection of the Enlightenment. . . . Reactionary modernism in the form of Nazi ideology was a powerful contributing factor in the subordination of technical rationality . . . to the claims of Nazi ideology.

I am not so sure. Yes, in the absence of anti-Semitism greater scientific advances could have been made; and the military transport system was indeed hindered by diverting rolling stock to deport Jews. But generally speaking, the Nazis made

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excellent use of modern technology. They produced high-quality weapons, managed some significant innovations in missiles, jet aircraft, and synthetic fuels, and made progress toward the development of nuclear weapons. The introduction of gas chambers to murder millions expeditiously was also, shall we say, a notable technical innovation. They had their technocrats, people like Albert Speer, a superior organizer who succeeded in raising military productivity under the adverse conditions of the last years of World War II. To be sure, irrational ends and values, and a willingness to wage war against an alliance of superior resources, assured the Nazi defeat, but not a neglectful, irrational, or reluctant approach to technology.

Still, this is an important and thought-provoking book. Jeffrey Herf is to be commended for confronting such complex issues in this thoroughly researched study. While his major and manifest concern is to explore the elements of "reactionary modernism" in Germany during Weimar and the Third Reich, and the ideas and intentions of its various representatives, Herf also usefully suggests that there may be some parallels, intended or not, between the German path to modernity during the 1930s and 1940s, and the course pursued by some contemporary Third World nations. As the author puts it in the preface:

> During the 1960s, it became fashionable to decry the application of the European experience to the non-Western world. Unique as the West is, contemporary events in the Third World suggest that . . . Germany remains the first new nation. . . . As long as nationalism remains a potent force, something like reactionary modernism will continue to confront us.

The German dilemma that this book carefully examines—how to reconcile modernity, especially in its technological manifestations, with an irrational ideology and a contempt for the very kind of free inquiry that accompanied such technological progress—was not unlike that of more recent modernizing nations, fiercely anti-Western yet desirous of Western technology in order to add to their power. The combination of such seemingly disparate orientations has not been easy for the rational and liberal Western mind to grasp or accept. In the matter of Soviet industrialization, too, a rationalistic interpretation has long held sway: time and again technology has been perceived as the harbinger of liberal political reform, and modernization as a "package deal" that would bring benevolent social and political change. There has been, in short, a deep-seated reluctance in the United States to conceive of modernity as compatible with obscurantist and destructive ideologies.

Yet combinations of ideological zeal and the efficient use of technology have become increasingly familiar phenomena in settings as diverse as Iran under the ayatollah, Qaddafi's Libya, and China during the Cultural Revolution. In these cases as well, nationalism provides the unifying thread joining putatively disparate elements. Contemporary anti-Western nationalists frequently claim, as did the German ideologues, that they could be, in Herf's words, "both technologically advanced *and* true to [their] soul." What the Nazi experience has most clearly shown is that it is possible to embrace modernity selectively.

Herf himself seems to be wary of analogies, and of two minds about the uniqueness of reactionary modernism. He concludes that "reactionary modern-

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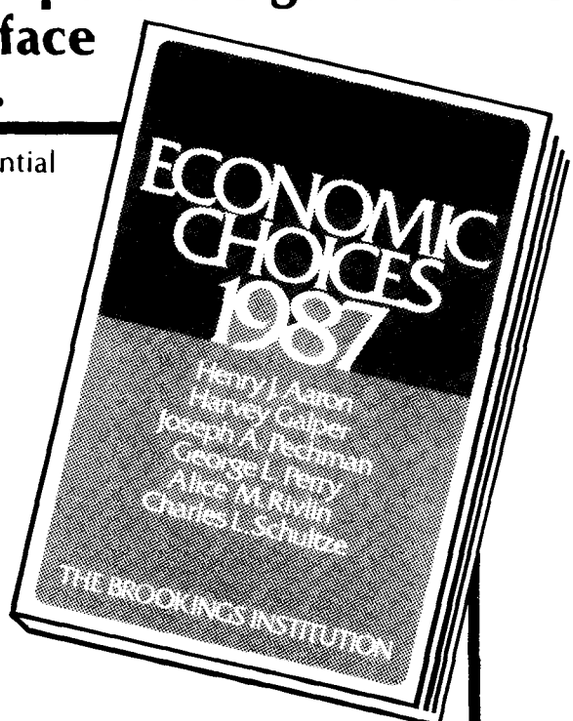

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ism was a specifically German response to a universal dilemma of societies facing the consequences of the industrial and French revolutions. . . ." But a few pages later he notes: "When these cultural patterns have appeared in places other than Germany, it is because Germany's path to modernity has been reproduced outside Europe." The analogies, in the end, are hard to escape.

PAUL HOLLANDER

Paul Hollander is professor of sociology at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Reconsideration: James Fenimore Cooper

IMAGINING AMERICA

BY ANDREW DELBANCO

"COOPER'S NOVELS seem to fall into two classes: those that we liked to read when we were young, and those that no one reads any more." In the 50 years since Robert Spiller made that remark, the second class has surely grown to include most of Cooper's work, while the first (if we construe "young" to mean a few coerced college students) has shrunk, at best, to *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and possibly *The Prairie* (1827). Our once-central books have long been receding into a sort of academic half-life, so there is nothing especially startling about the case of Cooper, who has endured just the sort of process that the Library of America was invented to resist. Now, in its fifth year of publication, the Library has brought out all five Leatherstocking Tales, under the editorship of Blake Nevius, in their definitive text.

Cooper wrote more than 40 books, including social satire, utopian fantasy, Venetian intrigue, a history of the United States Navy, travelogues, and political commentary, but he knew that "if anything from the pen of this writer . . . is at all to outlive himself, it is, unquestionably, the series of 'The Leather-Stocking Tales.' " He knew as well how tenuous was his hold on his audience in his own time; worrying, for instance, that his early sea-romance, *The Pilot* (1823), had not attracted the female readership essential for commercial success: "Women," he wrote in a retrospective preface 25 years later, "very generally protested that such a book would have the odor of bilge-water, and that it would give them the *maladie de mer*." This comment, made at about the same time that Hawthorne was complaining about "the damned mob of scribbling women," was more than the usual authorial grumble. Cooper was aware that not only did a sexual division have to be bridged if a new national culture was to be formed,

The Leatherstocking Tales (The Library of America, two volumes, 1,376 pp. and 1,072 pp., $27.50 each)

but also that Americans were not immune to the Old World problem of class, that they would have to find ways to accommodate the idea of democracy with the persistence of social distinctions.

Like any American with pretensions to culture in the early 19th century, Cooper was keen to refute the reiterated slander by Europeans that the New World remained mainly an open range for beasts and bestial men. Charles Dickens, for instance, observed with mixed disgust and delight that even America's senators—presumably its highest examples of breeding and discretion—were too salivary to confine themselves to their spittoons, resorting instead to the carpeted Senate floor. Dickens, who went on to urge that visitors to the capitol should avoid reaching down with ungloved hand even in pursuit of a dropped purse, was only one in a long procession of acid commentators on American "manners." Here is one of his predecessors, Frances Trollope, in an equally wary mood:

> The theory of equality may be very daintily discussed by English gentlemen in a London dining-room, when the servant, having placed a fresh bottle of cool wine on the table, respectfully shuts the door, and leaves them to their walnuts and their wisdom; but it will be found less palatable when it presents itself in the shape of a hard, greasy paw, and is claimed in accents that breathe less of freedom than of onions and whiskey. Strong, indeed, must be the love of equality in an English breast if it can survive a tour through the Union.

Cooper shared this sense of disjunction between the idea of democracy and the breath of the democrat. Beginning in the late 1820s, he even became something of an expatriate, serving for a while in the ceremonial position of consul at Lyons, but mainly seeing the sights on the Continent. He cut, apparently, a less than dignified figure, "strutting," according to Hazlitt, "through the streets [of Paris] with a very consequential air . . . as if he never relaxed in the assumption nor wanted it forgotten by others, that he was the American Walter Scott"—a comparison that was less than fair, but which he knew had something to it. James Kent, the great New York jurist, had sent him off on his European tour by toasting him as "the genius which has rendered our native soil classic ground, and given to our early history the enchantments of fiction." When Cooper returned to Jacksonian America, still hoping to live up to Kent's compliment and live down Hazlitt's insult, he brought with him little more than Mrs. Trollope's drawing-room acquaintance with democracy—and a consequent expectation for his country that fluctuated between hope and horror.

The result was a series of bilious books expressing Cooper's recoil from what Brooks Adams was later to call "the degradation of the democratic dogma." America, Cooper thought, was becoming drunk on the idea of equality—an idea with which he himself had a real but abstract sympathy, and which he had always construed within the limiting terms of Jeffersonian agrarianism. "Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators," Jefferson had fervently believed,

> is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example. It is the mark set on those, who not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, as does the husbandman, for their subsistence, depend for it on the casualties and caprice of customers. Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition.

America by the 1830s was nothing if not ambitious and was more and more

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running on the "casualties and caprice of customers." The Erie Canal had been in full operation since 1825, cutting across the countryside of Cooper's fiction; Lowell, Massachusetts—recently no more populated than Cooperstown—had been transformed into one of the world's textile centers. Indeed the pace of change had so quickened that Americans were becoming accustomed to a rhythm of boom and bust in their lives. Industrialization, which by one of the great ironies of American history had received its first push from Jefferson's embargo on foreign trade near the end of his presidency, was becoming a fact, rather than the Old World specter it had once seemed to be.

COOPER'S admiration for the Jeffersonian ideal was, in short, growing in inverse proportion to its accuracy as a description of American life. It was, moreover, an admiration achieved against the persuasion of his inheritance: "I was brought up," he confessed, "in that school where [Jefferson's] image seldom appeared, unless it was clad in red breeches, and where it was always associated with the idea of infidelity and political heresy." (Cooper's Federalist father had once dragged an opponent of the Alien and Sedition Acts from his bed and sent him off in shackles.) But by the early 1820s, Cooper felt very differently, finding in Jefferson's portrait the image of "a gentleman, appearing in all republican simplicity . . . [with] dignity [and] repose." He was in search of a native tradition that could slow the rush toward a mercantile society, and Jefferson provided it.

As property—or at least the ownership of land—began to lose its place as the measure of status in Jacksonian America, Cooper (who was a considerable landowner) frankly feared that demagoguery would take hold of the urban mob, which was swelling with immigrants and getting the vote. Cooper was never so much disturbed by "common" men as he was by those who seemed to him to be manipulating them for their own gain. For example, *Homeward Bound*, his novel of 1838, presents a Democratic newspaper editor, wickedly named Steadfast Dodge, who panders to "the different public opinions that were whiffling through the county," and explains the meaning of liberty this way: "Equal laws, equal rights, equality in all respects, and pure, abstract, unqualified liberty, beyond all question." "What," replies the skeptical aristocrat who walks through the novel in a state of disorientation much like Cooper's own, "a power in the strong man to beat the little man, and to take away his dinner?" It was the dwindling note of noblesse oblige that Cooper missed in American life, and whose disappearance he feared would usher in an age of chaos.

AS WITH many American snobs, Cooper mixed his distaste for the arriviste with a certain self-doubt. His father, a New Jersey Federalist of plain Quaker lineage, had begun in mid-life to buy land in the upper Hudson Valley, and after years of accumulating faraway tenants, decided to move there to become a kind of feudal seigneur. There he built a mansion that has been aptly likened to "a gentleman in corduroy with a diamond stick pin," and literally carved the village of Cooperstown out of the forest—the experience that provided the basis nearly 30 years later for his son's first Leatherstocking tale, *The Pioneers* (1823). It was the book in which Natty Bumppo made his initial appearance—as an aging woodsman of instinctive decency who is confronted by such novel concepts as the "hunting season" and such "civilized" innovations as the massacre of pigeons by cannon.

Cooper made Natty's horror his own, which was a remarkable act of sympathy since the fledgling writer who recreated his childhood in *The Pioneers* (Judge Temple, the lawgiver of the novel, is a barely disguised version of the elder Cooper) had lived the life of a squire's scion, at least until his father was attacked by a political opponent with a cane—and died from the blow. Yet the younger Cooper (like Melville after him, whose own sense of privilege was more a matter of family memory than of actuality) had also sailed before the mast. He touched, in other words, both poles of American life; he had been sent to Yale (possibly because Princeton retained too evangelical a temper), but had gotten himself "rusticated" for irreverent behavior. By training and temperament he was eager to celebrate George Washington for his "impressive dignity . . . so conspicuously denot[ing] the empire of reason," but he was also able to write without condescension about the sweat and muscle of illiterate seamen. Cooper not only knew something about America's contradictions; he embodied them.

Yet his literary gifts became apparent, even to himself, only after he married into another family of means and settled into domesticity at Scarsdale. (One of the pleasures of reading him today is to be pulled back into the former grandeur of what is now suburbia.) And he did not begin with a strong sense of his own voice. His first effort to convince American readers that it was worth their time to read an American book was a Jane Austen imitation, *Precaution* (1820), a novel as dull as its title, which he recognized quickly as an act of dutiful mimicry. Though he eventually returned (with comparably small success) to the mode of social satire, his next effort was brilliantly different and achieved both a popular success and a new authenticity of voice. Set in Westchester during the revolution, *The Spy* (1821) centered on a family divided between Tory and Patriot sentiments, and on a ragged peddler who turns out to be Washington's most trusted secret agent. Harvey Birch, the mysterious spy of the title, was a kind of prototype for Natty Bumppo—prescient, half-savage, an isolato whom no prison could hold. He is the first of many figures whom Cooper imbued with a zeal for the patriot cause that grows hotter as it is concealed, but the real force of the book is its revelation of Birch's courtly loyalty beneath his primitive mask.

A few years later Cooper created a similar figure in the title character of *The Red Rover* (1828)—a pirate who preys on the British merchant fleet in the years before the revolution, and dies, an unrepentant old man in what was now the young republic, "with both hands elevated above his head . . . let[ting] fall before him the blazonry of intermingled stars and stripes . . ." This was Cooper's social hope: that the fever of democracy could be quieted but still somehow sustained. He bristled at the continuing European attack on the idea of a rankless society, yet he could not bear the pros-

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pect that the nation would be shaped by the competitive ambitions of grasping speculators.

He was, in short, a troubled witness to the passing of what little tradition America had. His lamentation took many forms. He filled his sea-fictions, for example, with a density of technical detail that constitutes a tribute to a dwindling skill; he made satire out of the pomposity of political hacks; he recorded the transformation of craftsmen into employees; and most effectively, he surrounded Natty Bumppo with rootless men who do not know the difference between the smoke of an Indian's campfire and a white man's. Cooper's several novels of the revolution and, in certain respects the Leatherstocking Tales as well, are finally works of the same sort as Forster's *Howards End* and Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*—books that ask, with urgency, who will rule the postwar world.

His subject, then, was nothing less than America's destiny, though as Leslie Fiedler has famously remarked, he had a less capacious sense of audience—producing "books for boys" set in "places where mothers do not come." In this respect his writing was consonant with much of the literature of his time, which was as sanguinary as anything conjured up today by Stephen King: cannibalism, revenge-killing, and fratricide were among its themes, as befits a literature of social terror. But Cooper wrote this way, I would suggest, not because he yearned for an uncomplicated world of male fellowship and bracing combat, but precisely because he sensed the dangerous absence of a "feminine" principle in American life. He knew that the energy and brutality of Jacksonian America—westward expansion and Indian removal, rising industrial strength in the North and a slave system in the South that grew steadily harsher—were everywhere bound together. His books are full of dualities—pairs of noble and ignoble savages (Pawnee and Sioux, Delaware and Mingo); light women and dark—all enacting a struggle for the American soul. It was as an embodiment of the idea of reconciliation that Natty Bumppo was invented.

Natty was not born whole in Cooper's mind. Not only was he preceded by such models as Harvey Birch, but he went through a process of mythic enlargement that is traceable through the five romances. At the start, in *The Pioneers*, he has a certain manginess that makes him vaguely comic. He seems an urchin grown old, forever proving himself by saving damsels in distress—specifically from such perils as fire and panthers, generally from the threat of degradation. Yet he deepens with each book. In *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper takes him back 40 years to the French and Indian War, but advances him spiritually until he becomes a kind of Christianized Indian dealing out lifesaving lessons to those who have converted him. It is as if Cooper needs to invest with strength what he had formerly regarded as picturesque in its passing, namely the man who displays a serenity of mind and a moral certitude that come only through intimacy with nature. Here is Natty's extraordinary description of Glenn's Falls:

> If you had daylight, it would be worth the trouble to step upon the height of this rock, and look at the perversity of the water. It falls by no rule at all; sometimes it leaps, sometimes it tumbles; there, it skips, here, it shoots; in one place 'tis white as snow, and in another 'tis green as grass; hereabouts, it pitches into deep hollows, that rumble and quake the 'arth; and thereaway, it ripples and sings like a brook, fashioning whirlpools and gulleys in the old stone, as if 'twas no harder than trodden clay. The whole design of the river seems disconcerted. First it runs smoothly, as if meaning to go down the descent as things were ordered; then it angles about and faces the shores; nor are there places wanting where it looks backward, as if unwilling to leave the wilderness, to mingle with the salt! Aye, lady, the fine cobweb-looking cloth you wear at your throat, is coarse, and like a fishnet, to little spots I can show you, where the river fabricates all sorts of images, as if, having broke loose from order, it would try its hand at everything. And yet what does it amount to! After the water has been suffered to have its will, for a time, like a headstrong man, it is gathered together by the hand that made it, and a few rods below you may see it all, flowing on steadily toward the sea, as was foreordained from the foundation of the 'arth!

This is, as is all "descriptive" writing, an endorsement if not a projection of value—specifically, an interpretation of American nature as a divine image of conflict resolved. Cooper had put the same conviction into *The Spy*, in which he painted scenes of military carnage "gradually dispersing ... above the peaceful graves of its victims ... [into] one solitary cloud, the collected smoke of the contest." This was, again, a transformation of the Jeffersonian vision into symbolic language, something that Jefferson himself had performed in his famous "description" of the passage of the Potomac through the Blue Ridge:

As The Romans Do

When you've had your morning coffee on the street
With a fierce political journal and brandy on the side,
When you've waved to Gianni, Pippo, Mauro and Maria,
When you've chatted with Nina, said how good she looks,
When you've described for Antonio in no uncertain terms
The sort of retribution your football team deserves,
When you've yawned, stretched, thoroughly digested
And walked the winding alleyway to the public square,
Then, as the sun appears suddenly above the roofline
Of churches and cafés, and the blue-white sky descends
Right down to the pavement and to you, the light it bears
Scattering over the ornate fountain you stand beside,
So that a coruscating reflection of blaze and shade
Forms an intricate design more fascinating than fire,
A warp and weft of constant motion, no more to be grasped
Than the flickering chiaroscuro of your own thoughts ...
Then, reaching out to steady yourself on the incised stone,
Raise a hand in mute salutation, to the shifting pattern
That passes before you, to a future forever about to happen
Here in this ancient place crowded with the past,
Where the waters leap upward like a voice within you
And the sunlight comes down to gild your turbulence,
In Rome, in Rome, *paisano*, do as they all must do.

George Bradley

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> The mountain being cloven asunder, she presents to your eye, through the cleft, a small catch of smooth blue horizon, at an infinite distance in the plain country, inviting you, as it were, from the riot and tumult roaring around, to pass through the breach and participate of the calm below.

Natty Bumppo, like Jefferson's spent Potomac, is finally an emblem of faith that America, born in conflict, could yet find resolution.

And so Natty speaks a middle language, poised between the natural metaphors of the Indians—"My father ... has never seen a buffalo change to a bat; he will never see a Pawnee become a Sioux!"—and the language of utility that expressed the settlers' relation to the nature they were steadily expropriating: "I see but little difference," says one of them, "whether a man gets his peltry by the rifle or the trap.... The 'arth was made for our comfort; and, for that matter, so are its creatur's." Natty is a border figure, somewhere between red and white, even between male and female, as are so many of the great "teachers" of American literature, such as Queequeg, Jim, Uncle Tom. He refuses both the religion of nature and the religion of power, speaking instead in biblical cadences that Cooper knew were acquiring an elegiac sound in the ears of his readers:

> Here I have been a dweller on the earth for fourscore and six changes of the seasons, and all that time have I looked at the growing and the dying trees, and yet do I not know the reasons why the bud starts under the summer sun or the leaf falls when it is pinched by the frosts.... Knowledge! It is [God's] plaything. Say, you who think it is easy to climb into the judgment seat above, can you tell me anything of the beginning and the end? ... Why does the eagle live so long, and why is the time of the butterfly so short?

Natty becomes a chaste guardian of the numinous, for which womanhood emerges as the leading symbol. Fair Alice in *The Last of the Mohicans* and dark Inez in *The Prairie* are but two of the rescued beauties whom he keeps from both "savage" and "civilized" corruption. He cannot be paired with a woman (*The Deerslayer*, 1841, is largely about his flight from domestication), but he also cannot be separated from his task of guardianship over her. This is in part a fantasy of national redemption, another instance, perhaps, of the American obsession with maternity; one could even make a case for Cooper as a sort of Episcopalian Portnoy. Yet Natty, despite his strangely asexual gallantry, becomes a figure of more poignancy than pathology as he is pushed to the social margin. Cooper clings to him with moving devotion, bringing him back in youth in *The Pathfinder* (1840) and *The Deerslayer* after having meditated on his death 15 years before in *The Prairie*. One finishes the Leatherstocking series with a sense that Natty is in eternal and indispensable service: "I shall receive my babes," says the father of a kidnapped daughter in *The Last of the Mohicans*, "spotless and angel-like as I lost them." Natty, we know, will deliver them.

It is true that Cooper, perhaps as a kind of compensation for the melodrama of his plots, tried too hard to put gentility into his style, sometimes allowing himself sentences that, as Lionel Trilling once remarked of Dreiser's, are "literary in the bad sense ... full of flowers of rhetoric and shin[ing] with paste gems." Mark Twain, who had even less tolerance for pious prose than did Trilling, put it this way: "There have been daring people in the world who claimed that Cooper could write English—but they are all dead now." Perhaps so. But the remarkable thing about this man who had so many opportunities to shrivel into mere reaction is that he became, like Jonathan Edwards before him and Whitman and Melville after him, a great and truly national prose-poet.

Five times in his literary career Cooper turned away from his oppressive present (of which he spent years wrangling with the tenants he had inherited from his father) and imagined a dark yet clear world in which virtue did not always triumph but could know itself and be known. In some ways the Leatherstocking novels were escapist, enacting a retreat into the past. But as I have tried to suggest, they were also a part of Cooper's effort to come to terms with a world from which all hierarchies of value seemed to be disappearing. He held the line in the Leatherstocking novels against the felt approach of social apocalypse, though in other fictions, such as *The Crater* (1847), he gave in to such fears and imagined the world going literally to hell.

He was a deeply conservative man, and belongs in the lineage that includes such dissenters as John Calhoun—figures who have had a very clear sense of the processes of power in American society, but whose social critiques tend to evade and elide the distinctions between left and right. Whether or not we can translate Cooper's politics out of his time into ours, he surely permits us the sort of critical judgment that is currently out of favor: to read him is to be elevated. This is in part because he looked to nature not for self-therapy, as did so many of his contemporaries, but for an emblem of his nation's future, from which he considered his personal fate to be inextricable. In the fictions that have now taken their proper place in the Library of America, Cooper recorded his own disillusionment with a society where privilege was both universally scorned and universally desired. Yet he always wrote about his country with what Fiedler calls (in a phrase I do not presume to improve) "the ferocity of baffled love"—and reading the Leatherstocking Tales makes it possible still to feel that this is an available emotion. □

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Fears

THERE'S A NEW TWIST in Washington on the old it-won't-work excuse. As often as not when a politician offers this explanation for opposing some policy or program, he really means precisely the opposite. The real, but unstated, reason for opposition is: good heavens, this crazy proposal might actually work, and then we'd really be up the creek. Politicians of all ideological stripes have adopted the tactic. Liberals and conservatives alike complain that Gramm-Rudman just won't reduce the deficit. But their real fear is that, egad, it would promote a balanced budget by whacking the hell out of spending. Liberals worry that domestic welfare programs would be cut to the bone, or worse. Conservatives fret that military spending would be imperiled. But how many Gramm-Rudman foes admit as much? Few. Nor do critics of Star Wars often confess their secret fear that President Reagan's scheme for shielding the United States from nuclear attack might be attainable. That, of course, is exactly what they don't want because, in their view, it would give the U.S. the edge over the Soviets and upset the nuclear balance. Star Wars proponents, on the other hand, are critical of arms control agreements. Their argument is—you guessed it—that treaties won't work because the Soviets will cheat, etc. In truth, they are apoplectic over the prospect that a new treaty might work all too well, blocking them from moving ahead with Star Wars and other cherished weapons systems. Then there is the Contadora treaty, which conservatives don't want the Reagan administration to sign. The Sandinistas won't live up to it, the conservatives say. Maybe not, but what alarms conservatives even more is the chance that the Sandinistas might adhere to it after a fashion, while the administration abandons the *contras*. The treaty would legitimize the Sandinista regime and leave it unchallenged, which is the conservatives' worst-case scenario. Most liberals would be perfectly happy to see the *contras* jettisoned. But their chief argument against aid to the *contras* is that it won't work because, they insist, the *contras* can't win. Senator Edward Kennedy has belabored this point in Senate debates on Nicaragua. Well, what if the *contras* could win? he was asked not long ago by Brit Hume of ABC News. Would you favor aid then? Nope, Kennedy confessed, sheepishly but honestly.

I'VE WONDERED from time to time where the high and mighty come up with their ideas. It must take hours, days, even months or years, of deep thinking, right? Not always. My only experience is with the Barnes Doctrine, my very own criteria for deciding whether the United States should back some non-Communist but nondemocratic government. While writing a piece on Ferdinand Marcos and the Philippines not long ago, I devoted five minutes or so to figuring out guidelines for judging whether a pro-American autocrat ought to get U.S. support. I stopped at four guidelines, though I could have gone on: Is the ruler effective, especially in promoting economic growth? Is he able to beat back Communists? Does he allow some human rights? Is there any non-Communist alternative to him? O.K., so these aren't the weightiest guidelines you've ever heard, but at least they're my own. But a man with a reputation as one of the great geopolitical strategists of our time, Richard Nixon, lifted my criteria for use in a major foreign policy speech in April. Dressed up in a Nixon speech, the guidelines sounded downright substantial. I was amazed. And my question about where the greats get their material was answered.

SPEAKING OF NIXON, *Newsweek* asserted in its May 18 cover story that "he's back." Well, I guess he is. But this kind of story is unusual. The press normally concentrates on declaring political figures dead, not alive. Nixon, after all, was ruled DOA following his 1962 defeat in the California governor's race. Reagan was said to be finished after his defeat in the 1980 Iowa caucuses. Jesse Helms was declared kaput when he trailed James Hunt by 20 points in polls months before the North Carolina governor's race in 1984. And so on, up to and including the latest official dead man, David Stockman. You should hear the talk among Washington journalists about him. Not only is he through politically, most agree, but soon the Wall Street brokerage firm that hired him will have to face up to his disloyalty and bad judgment and wave good-bye. Sorry, but Stockman's about as dead as Nixon was in 1962. The guy is too smart, too ambitious, and too cunning to stay out of politics for long. And he's laid the ideological groundwork for a new Stockman to emerge, Dave the neoliberal. Here's a guy who is skeptical about the federal government without wanting to dismantle it, except for the business subsidies. He is also a critic of Pentagon excess—he goes on and on about this in his book, *The Triumph of Politics*—without being reflexively antidefense. Alas, he's embraced what there is of a neoliberal agenda. Now that Gary Hart's voting record is more old-liberal than Teddy Kennedy's, the neoliberals are bound to be looking for a new hero. Stockman's the one.

AMERICAN FRIENDS of the Sandinistas go to extraordinary lengths to defend the Nicaraguan regime, none more so than religious leaders. It's one thing to condemn the *contras* for alleged human rights abuses and to differ with Reagan's Central American policy. It's something else again to pretend that religious persecution doesn't exist in Nicaragua. Not long ago, four United Methodist missionaries stoutly defended the state of emergency imposed by the Sandinistas. They accused the hierarchy of Nicaragua's Roman Catholic Church, which faces strong Sandinista repression, of having "abused their freedoms of religion and speech to work in support of the counterrevolution." Worse yet is Catholic bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit. On "The MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour" he balked at saying anything critical of the Sandinistas. "One word," Elliott Abrams, the assistant secretary of state, shouted at him. "Give me one word. Give me one word about Sandinista pressure on the Church. One word of criticism." "Why do I want to give you a word of criticism?" the bishop asked. Finally, he conceded the Sandinistas had "made mistakes." But they're "willing to admit their mistakes." Which is more than Bishop Gumbleton is willing to do.

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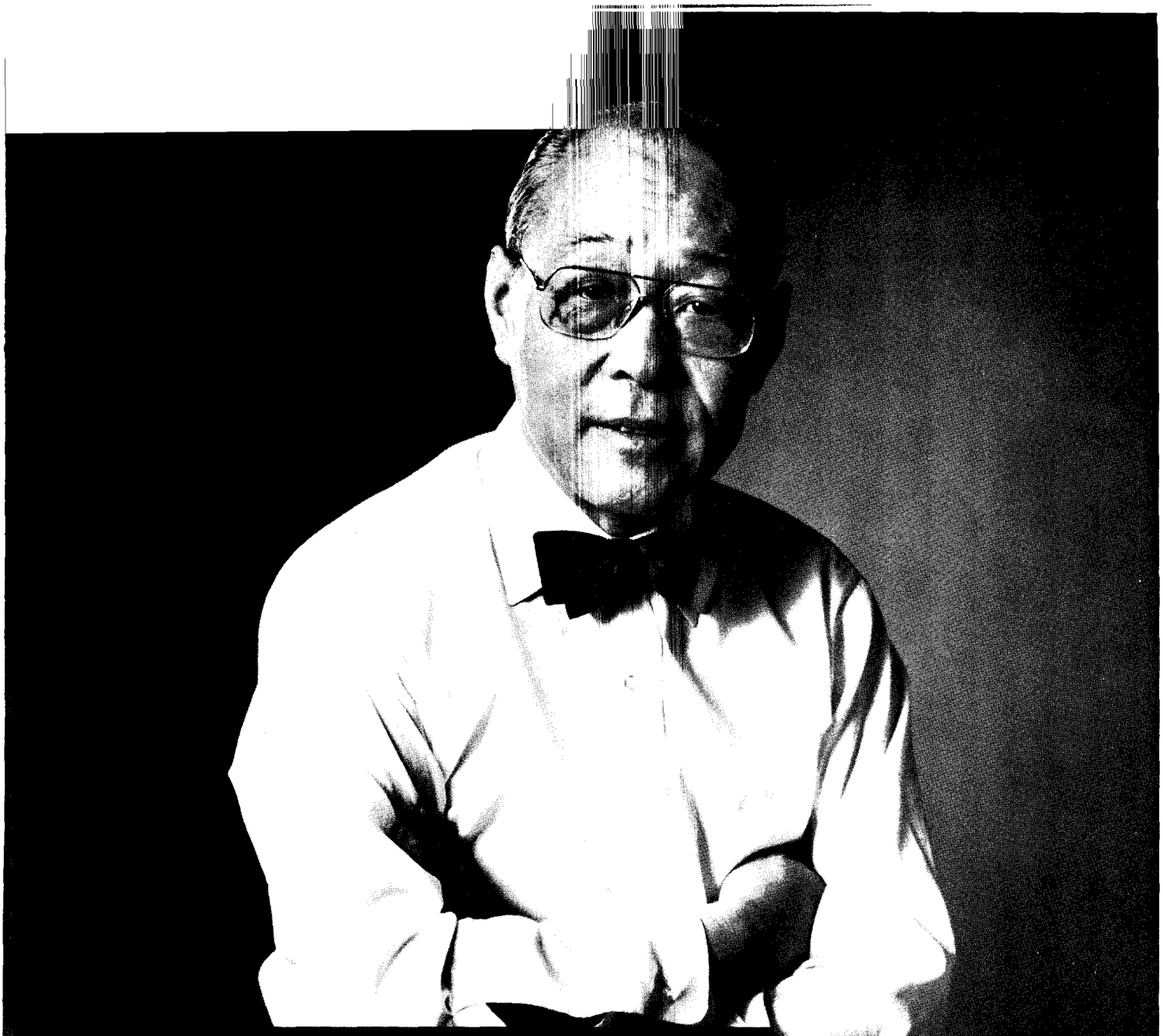

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